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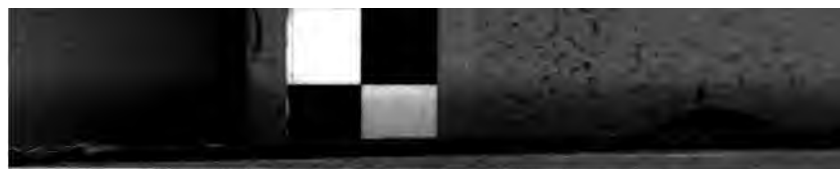
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In after years that child may bring her sorrow, wring from her eyes their bitterest tears; yet, for all other joys, she would not part with memory of the happiness her darling brought her.

C. E. A.



THE
DAYS WE LIVE IN.

A STORY OF SOCIETY.

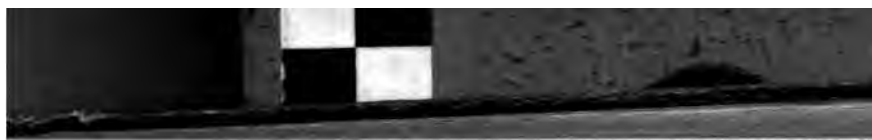
Dr. C. E. A.

"It may be glorious to write
 Theses that are linked the best of men
 Right to the floor of heaven and the stars
 Only to be burning
 In the air is open
 The light which, when they have them
 Sheds upon the nations in the years
 At the offices of men."

LOWELL

BOSTON:
W. F. BROWN & COMPANY
1876.





Aiken, Clementine Edith
" "

THE

DAYS WE LIVE IN.

A STORY OF SOCIETY.

By C. E. A.

"It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century ;—
But better far to speak
One simple word, which, now and then,
Shall waken their free natures in the weak
And friendless sons of men."

—LOWELL.

BOSTON:
W. F. BROWN & COMPANY.
1876.

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INTRODUCTION.

TO the incredulous friends who predicted failure while they wished success, and shook wise, misbelieving heads while they subscribed to this effort at self-help, is offered earnest, heartfelt thanks, but — to the few sterling souls who from first to last turned hitherward with love and encouragement, and aided in deed as well as in strong, live words of faith and hope, is given the tenderest remembrance always.

C. E. A.





P R E F A C E .

——— “ Would it have been worth Hilda’s while to relinquish this office for the sake of giving the world a picture or two which it would call original ; pretty fancies of snow and moonlight ; the counterparts in pictures of so many feminine achievements in literature.”

Thus contemptuously said an author to me the other day, as I was patiently wading through pages of tiresome repetition, to get at the gist of nothing in particular. Whatever that most unflattering delineator of womankind would have called my story, had it appeared in his day, and been noticed by him, it certainly would *not* have been snow and moonlight ; for I have found life too real, too vivid, its bliss too exquisite, its pain too intense, to paint it with colors so cold and shadowy. One has only to ascend high enough to learn the unvarying truth of human sorrow, or descend low enough to learn the equal truth of human error, and learn also the divine marriage of the two, to feel the utter falsity of those pretty, whitened, unreal things called men and women which we find in the accepted story-book.

Learn, as I have learned the hidden secrets of the

wayward yet tender heart, search the depth of the wonderful soul of women and men with whom you daily commune, and who may yet remain entirely unknown to you, study the veiled motive for this or that open act, be so gifted that grief or sin-burdened humanity turns to you for sympathy as a distressed child turns to a pitying mother, and you would find beings pictured from imagination, and hedged in by prescribed lines, become tame and commonplace, side by side with those you know, whom you meet daily in the world's great thoroughfare, whose life, could it be written, were a tragedy or a psalm. Thus conscious of the many, many such, you weary with the make-believes in stories when the realities are all about you, tinted with every hue, from the pale rose hue of the dawn to the blackest night.

Let not the reader, then, marvel at my word-pictures, or blame me for truths rarely spoken, or say they are too deeply colored; I paint women and men as I have found them, and to picture human attributes and passions as I have known them, I would have my pen dipped in the glow of a summer sunset, or the lowering gloom of a thunder-charged storm.

C. E. A.

Boston, July 20, 1876.

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THE DAYS WE LIVE IN.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE.

"But a dream,
Too flattering sweet to be substantial." — SHAKESPEARE.

THE ROCKS "lay in the hush of a rayless summer night. The far stars could not pierce the velvet darkness, and the winds were at rest. The shrubs, the trees, and the vast piles of rocks that gave the place its name, were only a little blacker than the surrounding landscape. Even the broad river, whose distant murmur alone jarred the stillness, gleamed but faintly. Hours later, when the perfected moon of this most beautiful month shall come up in her splendor, all this will be changed ; but now, ah, surely the enchanter's wand is at hand ! for from every window of the vast irregular dwelling the lights all in a moment glanced, and from every branch of the lofty trees the colored lamps glowed brightly, making distinct as by daylight the unrivalled

perfection of lawn and gardens that surrounded the mansion.

Simultaneous with the illumination, the scream of the advancing train announced the near approach of expected guests ; and life and bustle replaced the utter silence of a few moments before.

The wide entrance stood invitingly open ; and, as carriage after carriage deposited its freight of friends and acquaintances before it, rich strains of welcoming music burst on the fragrant air.

Never, perhaps, on this side of the Atlantic had a more glittering throng been gathered beneath one roof, or more extensive or successful efforts been made to entertain them. The mansion was built by the grandfather of the present owner, Richard Vernon, and remodelled by himself. It presented all the spaciousness of the past age, with the elegant finish of the present. An oval-shaped hall led quite through the house ; and, on either side of this, the long drawing-rooms glowing with light, and rich with all that wealth could buy and refined taste collect, presented a scene of gorgeousness rarely to be met with outside the Arabian Nights.

Beneath a chandelier, receiving her guests, stood the mistress of this fairy world, — a stately woman of full forty ; yet, so lightly had Time touched her in his passage, he had left none of his usual impress behind. There was not a line on the broad white brow ; and

the hair smoothly swept from her temples, showed no line of silver in its purple-black mass. The satin-smooth skin of neck and arms, and shapely hands, would lead you to believe in the fairy gift of perpetual youth, sometimes said to be lavished in the cradle. Very stately, very beautiful, in her black shimmering satin and rare white lace; very beautiful she certainly was as she stood confident in the blaze of light; yet pride, self-centered, overweening pride, was expressed in every turn of her handsome head, and gleamed in the depths of her luminous eyes.

Near her stood her son, slender and boyish in appearance, though fully twenty-one, and nobly handsome in face and form. No stranger would have taken them for mother and son certainly, still the resemblance was marvellous. The same perfect features, dark and haughty, the same rippling hair of purplish black; above all, the same deep, deep eyes slumberous and slow-moving beneath their heavy lids.

The shadow of a moustache darkened the young man's lip, while cheek and chin were still beardless. He continued to stand near his mother as the bright throng passed by, a smile and bow and courteous word of greeting for each; but not seeming to care to appropriate any, though Beauty smiled her sweetest, and many a girlish heart fluttered deeper roses to the fair cheek with the hope of his coming to her side. At last

his pre-occupied air attracted Mrs. Vernon's attention.

"Percy, what or of whom are you thinking?"

"Were you speaking to me mother?" The young man started abstractedly; for several minutes his eyes had been bent upon the floor, and one or two remarks had passed unanswered by him.

"How strange you appear, my son! Why don't you mingle with our guests? The young ladies will hardly thank your mother for keeping you by her side so long, and on the eve of your departure, too."

"Ah! my dearest mother, believe me, there is no one in this vast assembly who has power to draw me from your side; but if you command me, why, I go."

A tender light shone in her proud eyes, a tender loving light, adding a brighter lustre; but she made no reply, some new-comer claiming her attention. But her eyes followed her son, who turned away, and mingled with the moving throng. Something of the graceful freedom of the boy, joined with the innate dignity of manhood, made him a general favorite everywhere.

Standing apart, and nearly concealed by the window drapery, a gentleman with folded arms was watching mother and son. He appeared some five or six years older than Percy, and was a man of noble presence and a fine face. As the young man left his mother's side,

Philip Casā sauntered to the place vacated. A slight flush came to the lady's marble cheek as she observed his approach; and an anxiety, imperceptible to all save him, betrayed itself.

"Did you observe?" he asked, as he bent his head, but in a tone of ordinary greeting.

"I did, indeed, Don Philip," returned the lady in the same tone. "And if it proves as you suspect, the sooner my boy is away the better."

"I assure you, madam, I do not mistake." He paused. A wild, sweet prelude stole through the rooms as though a master hand had swept the keys; and then a clear, mellow voice burst forth in song. Every sound was hushed; not a movement of a fan, not a rustle of a silken robe, jarred the sudden stillness; and thus that thrilling voice held them until the song was finished. But the spell did not dissolve with one song. Through several the unseen songstress held her audience as it were entranced. When the singing ceased, and the glittering throng began to press towards the music-room to get a glimpse of the performer, who was still playing, Don Philip gave his arm to his hostess as though to follow; but she, with a little motion of impatience, turned the other way.

"I wish to speak with Alice. She is in the garden, and you must know the songstress or songs are not new to me. I am happy, however, to give our friends so rare a pleasure."

"It is indeed rare, madam. Such compass and richness of voice, brought to such perfect culture, is seldom heard in one so young." Philip Casā spoke with more warmth than the subject seemed to warrant; and Mrs. Vernon regarded him with slight, very slight surprise for one brief instant, and then dismissed the intrusive thought. He was a Cuban; and men nurtured in that glowing clime ever expressed themselves warmly. He was rich, rich in lands and gold; high-born, and past the impressionable age of her foolish Percy, when a sweet face and thrilling voice might drive him wild. However, the inflection of her voice was a little colder as she answered,—

"I believe she was intended for the stage by her very foolish parents, who denied themselves the comforts of life that they might educate their daughter. I speak advisedly, for I think it the height of folly for the poor common people to give their children a training so expensive, cultivating a taste for life so much above their station that they become presuming. If Gertrude had been given a good trade, how much better for all concerned!"

For an instant the vision of that delicate girl, as lovely and cultured as the loveliest, flashed before Philip Casā, bending over her wearing labor, soiling those white fingers, which he had often thought the prettiest in the world; and he felt like flinging this

grand woman's hand from his arm, and turn to the poor little one, and there, in the presence of all that proud company, beg her to share his honored name and abundant wealth; but well he knew the futility of the mad thought; so he only said, —

“You knew her parents, then?”

“Yes, I knew them. Her father was my husband's book-keeper many years. He died two years ago, leaving his wife and daughter destitute. Mrs. Lester was an invalid, and I scarcely know how they lived until she died one year ago; then Gertrude entered my family as governess for my little Helen. She has been treated with a consideration she would not receive in many families; and you see, Don Philip, how she repays my friendship. But you cannot feel interested in all this.”

“I am interested in all that relates to your delightful family, believe me, madam; and it was to save my young friend from an entanglement he would regret a lifetime, that I first drew your attention to the wiles of this young maiden.”

“I am most grateful,” returned the lady courteously. “I do not apprehend anything serious, though Percy has such strange ideas about equality of mind, and such nonsense. I trust a few years' travel, and associating with the society of foreign courts, will effectually change all this.”

“I think as you do, and I trust with all my heart it

will be so. But see, here is Miss Vernon holding her separate court."

They paused, as the termination of the avenue brought them in view of the young and queenly Alice, surrounded by her own admiring circle. Well might the mother's eye lighten with fond pride, as it rested on her daughter. Not only did she image her mother in form and face, but the same haughty soul was mirrored in her beautiful eyes. She was just eighteen, and had been bred with the full estimate of her worth ever before her. That she was beautiful, she well knew; and thoroughly accomplished, she was as well satisfied. These facts alone, she thought, entitled her to more than ordinary consideration; but, added to these facts, she was heiress in her own right to half a million, descended from a line of peers on her mother's side, and from generations of merchant princes on her father's. No wonder the little lady, with her peculiar training, considered herself equal to the best.

As Mrs. Vernon and Don Philip drew near, the rosy hue deepened on her delicate cheek, stealing even to the line of dark hair; and the restless look with which she had been watching the moving figures gave place to one of happy content; and a reader of the human heart would say at once, the proud girl had met her fate in the dark Cuban. But none save the mother read aright the momentary glimpse of the heart; and she,

well pleased to have it so, yielded up her cavalier, who had no choice but to remain by the fair lady who welcomed him with her sweetest smiles, and who, with the artlessness of art, detained him by her side the rest of the evening.

In the music-room, another drama of moment was transpiring. Seated at the piano, a girlish form bent with willowy grace, all unmindful of the curious commenters around her. She had been commanded to play and sing to amuse the company, and she had endeavored to fulfill her instruction to the best of her ability; and her best could not be surpassed. Such brilliance of expression, such firmness, yet lightness of touch; old familiar airs acquired new beauties with her execution, and every-day operas breathed a sweetness and pathos never detected before, as her deft fingers flew over the keys. This prodigy was only Gertrude Lester, little Helen Vernon's governess, who had not, as Mrs. Vernon carelessly stated, been trained for the stage; but, being from a little child, wonderfully fond of music, her father had indulged her to the utmost; and her teachers, enraptured with her rare voice and correct ear, and loving her for her gentle nature, had spared no pains to perfect her talent.

She was a delicate little creature, not quite seventeen. You would not call her beautiful at a glance; for her beauty was of a strange, wildering sort, that

stole upon your senses unawares. A profusion of tawny hair rippling from its very roots, and growing low upon her forehead; combs and pins were employed in vain to confine it properly: it would not be proper, it would not be confined; but breaking away, it kinked itself in a mass of curls about her brow, and rippled and danced with very mischief. She had tender, dreamy eyes of dark misty gray, rarely seen except by those who knew her well, and long curling lashes a little darker than her hair. Her mouth was large and sensitive, with intensely red lips, so seldom seen except in those yellow blondes. Altogether she was rare, sweet, and uncommon, as some bright bird strayed from a sunnier home to our cold North, and who must still sing on because it is its nature to sing.

No one seemed to know her; no one spoke to her; and she might have been alone, so entirely unconscious did she appear. Once only the rosy tide stole from the conscious heart, and deepened on the oval cheek; once only the pure tones faltered, wavered tremulous for an instant, and the half-veiled eyes flashed with the light that only shines in a woman's eyes when she greets the man she loves. Such for a moment disturbed her quiet, as Percy Vernon stood by the piano. She was alone no longer. What did she care for the haughty dames or disdainful beauties, the criticising coxcombs, or the indifferent man of the world? Well she knew

how fondly she was beloved by him who stood near. No wonder her listeners were entranced; no wonder they thought her inspired. She saw but one; and for him she played, and for him she sang, and her soul was in her song. Percy asked for a favorite, and she complied without a moment's hesitation; and, as he stooped to arrange the music, he uttered a few words. No answer was returned or required, and he stepped back; those near little dreaming the destiny of those two had been thus quickly decided.

I have already told you that the grounds around the Vernon mansion were laid out with great care; winding walks leading to shadowy dells, or miniature lakes set like gems in their emerald banks. Here and there a tiny fountain shot up into the moonlight, and fell again with a musical murmur into the marble basin below, or, breaking into a million sparkles, shone like an immense diamond in its dark setting. Elegant statuary gleamed cold and white amid the vivid green; while the climbing rose and sweet-scented jasmine in full bloom filled the June air with fragrance almost intoxicating; and over all at midnight shone the full, round moon, rendering the scene as light as noonday.

Beyond the garden in the rear of the house, the land sloped away, thickly covered with grand forest trees of centuries old. From the wide piazza, a flight of marble steps led down to a smooth gravel walk, which after

when we 'grew up.' I loved you then when I was a boy ; I have gone on loving you ever since ; until now, a man, I hold you the dearest thing on earth. Do you believe me ? ”

“ Yes, I believe you ; ” and the lovelit eyes were raised to his, their shyness all gone ; and the loving woman's soul shone in their depth.

“ Then, my Gertrude, I am going to ask a sacrifice, a test of your faith in me. I am going to ask you to give yourself to me wholly within this hour. Do you understand, dearest ? ” he pleaded hurriedly, as he held her closely in his arms. “ There is one waiting in yonder church to make you my very own. I would have you mine by every bond that can make my treasure secure.”

The fair girl gave him a startled glance, and half withdrew from his circling arms.

“ Why, my dearest love ! is it such a terrible thing to be married ? Does the thought of giving yourself to me frighten you, that you shrink from me ? ”

“ Oh, no, dear Percy ! but the proposition was so unexpected, so unthought of ! What would your parents say, and your haughty sister ? ”

“ That is just the sacrifice I desire you to make, my darling. Be my wife, with no witness save the one who gives you to me, and the minister who unites us. They will keep our secret until I return at the end of

three years, master of my fortune, to claim you before the world. You know — for I have told you — that I cannot claim any part of the immense fortune my grandfather left me, until I am twenty-four years old. I am dependent upon my father until then.”

“Dear Percy, let us wait. I will live but for you; and if, when you return, your mind is unchanged, I will joyfully redeem my promise.”

“And you can coolly discuss the possibility of change at this moment! I tell you,” he cried, pressing intense kisses on her lips, “I cannot wait to dream of you for three long years as a beautiful joy that may some time be mine. Three years! it will be an eternity. No, I cannot wait. I want you now, my Gertrude. Do not refuse me!”

“But think, dear, what would be said,” pleaded the girl, trembling at his vehemence, “if I should steal like a thief into a family so much above me. Your mother would scorn me; your kind, good father, even, would resent my taking advantage of your generous love. Wait until you return: you will be older, master of yourself and fortune.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the youth, releasing her, and half pushing her from him. “You are young, you are beautiful, you are accomplished; and the world is all before you. I was wrong to expect you to bind yourself to me by a clandestine marriage.” He strode

hastily up and down, while Gertrude, sinking on the rocky seat, watched him with yearnings, irresolute face. Her tearful eyes, and pale, grieved lips, it would have required a harder heart than Percy's to resist. After a dozen hasty strides, he threw himself on his knees beside her, and twining his arms round her waist and resting his head on her bosom, said, —

“Forgive my violence, darling ; I was a brute to treat you so ; but I am so disappointed and so wretched ! O Gerty, Gerty ! must I go away without making you mine beyond the possibility of doubt, beyond the possibility of want coming to you ? If you will be my wife, I can go on my journey cheerfully. Your love would be my shield from every evil, my incentive to every good. My father already dotes upon you, as upon either of his children. My mother will receive you fondly when she finds you are really my wife. Then why hesitate ? Your love is the one blessing I desire to complete my happiness, and you allow worldly prudence to stand between me and it. Oh, my precious ! you can never know how dear you are to me.”

Gertrude clasped his neck, and thriddled her white fingers through his hair ; but she did not reply save by mute kisses. It seemed cruel to refuse him this proof of her affection ; still to wed him clandestinely was against every principle of her nature. She had hoped to become his wife some time, perhaps years hence.

She knew well the pride of birth that swayed his family; but she hoped a blameless life, and Percy's constant love, would eventually overcome it all.

"Come, dear one, come," he urged, rising, and drawing her to him again. "Yield yourself to my guidance; I cannot leave you unprotected."

Gertrude was not proof against her lover's earnest persuasion and tender impetuosity, nor the pleading of her own heart.

"I will do as we both wish, dear Percy; but it is unwise. God grant you may never regret it!"

"Thank you, my dearest," he cried, rapturously, embracing her. "No danger of regret, unless you kill me with joy, which I think would be a very sweet way to die," he whispered.

He conducted her through the sleeping city, out upon the green before the church, then through the ivy-mantled porch, on the steps of which a youth, a mere boy, was crouching, who sprang forward, and opened the door. "It is Willie Earl, who sails with me to-morrow," whispered Percy assuringly; and they passed into the church. Percy led his trembling companion up the broad aisle to the altar. The chandeliers around this were ablaze, but the rest of the church was shrouded in gloom, only as the moonlight, streaming through the stained windows, cast an uncertain weird light around.

Near the altar stood two gentlemen; one dressed as for a festive occasion, the other in ministerial garments.

"It is my most intimate friend, Herbert Thornton, but lately ordained minister: the other is Allan Boyd; he is at the house to-night," again spoke Percy in an undertone. The poor girl was too much agitated to reply, though she understood him. A few words of introduction, and the ceremony commenced. In the impressive rites of the Episcopal Church they gave themselves to each other, with scarcely a witness save the listening angels. Woe to them whose profaning hand shall sunder hearts thus joined in perfect love and trust!

As the last word of the low-breathed blessing was pronounced above the bowed heads of the young couple, a dark face was pressed against the stained window, and a pair of flashing eyes at a glance comprehended the whole scene.

"Too late, too late!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth. "Curse the fate! why was I detained by that doll-face, until too late?"

He continued to watch until the certificate, hastily made out, was given to the bride; and the friends, bidding them farewell, left the church. He watched with a fiendish scowl on his dark, handsome face, as the lovers passed out. He, bending his proud head and radiant face to whisper words of fond encouragement,

and she, listening with her soul in her eyes, knew nothing of the black fate already bending above them.

He watched until Willie Earl put out the lights, and closed the doors, and turned homeward. Then with bent head and compressed lips, he took the path through the graveyard, through the moss-grown stile, through the cool vine-tangled wood, out through the winding gravel walk and dew-spangled park to the mansion. Slowly he walked, his wily brain concocting a scheme in which devils might glory, to desolate two young lives.

In the mean time, Gertrude was kneeling by her window, her hands clasped above her beating heart, and listening dreamily to the strains of glad music, the gush of merry laughter, and striving to catch the tones of him so dear to her,—now dearer he could not be,—half terrified at what had been done, yet wildly happy that Percy was all her own; never dreaming, in her innocence, what it was possible for a proud, unscrupulous woman to do, to carry out her schemes, or the heart of daring man when disappointed in his mad passion.

And Percy below, perfectly radiant with his hidden joy, surpassed himself in brilliant gayety. The mother regarded him fondly, and his sister with delight. In the early part of the evening they had wondered at his

abstraction ; but being no clairvoyants, they saw nothing except that which appeared to the eye. None knew, save the dark, sullen Cuban, lowering at him from the embrasure of the window ; and he had not yet spoken.



CHAPTER II.

LOVE AS DETECTIVE.

"Is it possible
That love should of a sudden take
Such hold?" — SHAKESPEARE.



MY friend, you have already divined that it was not alone friendship for the Vernons, that led Philip Casā to interest himself in the young lovers, and even stoop to play the spy on their actions. It was not. It was the sudden, fierce, uncontrolled passion which had sprung up in his impulsive, undisciplined heart for Gertrude, almost as soon as he beheld her, and this passion was as surprising to himself as it was unwelcome to its object.

The autumn before the June festival I have just been telling you about, at the urgent invitation of Percy, whom he fascinated greatly, he made a visit of several weeks to the Rocks. It was on the evening of his arrival, while sitting in the twilight with the family, that he first listened to that marvellous voice. The music-room was but dimly lighted, and he could only see the outlines of a slender figure in black, with a

mass of tawny hair falling about her shoulders, seated at the piano. He listened enraptured, as the swelling tones rose in grand harmony, filling the lofty rooms, then melting away in mellow cadence, its lowest notes pure and distinct, yet soft as the lowest whisper of a wind harp.

Don Philip was a worshipper of music, so without seeing the face of the singer, he found himself in love with a beautiful voice. He expected when the music ceased, the singer would appear in the family circle, and he waited with some impatience, her coming, after the last notes died away. For, he reasoned, only a beautiful face can accompany such a voice, therefore she must be angelic. But he was disappointed, and that night his dreams were of black-robed angels, contrary to all preconceived notions of celestial residents, but always with averted faces, or faces hidden by masses of tawny hair. Ravishing strains of melody floated around him, now far, now near, and he would start out of his troubled sleep almost certain the strains were real. "Who is she? What is she like?" he would drowsily murmur, falling away to sleep again to waken in the same unsatisfactory way until morning. He arose unrefreshed, his mind still dwelling on the unseen singer.

At the breakfast table, he was introduced to Gertrude. "It must be she," he thought, as he took in

the simple mourning dress devoid of ornament, and her bright hair gathered plainly in a net, or as plainly as the rippling mass could be gathered. "She certainly is not beautiful," was his next mental comment, yet he found himself glancing more than once to the delicate face with its downcast eyes, wondering perhaps what their color could be. She seldom spoke, only when addressed, and that was not often, but Don Philip was a keen observer, and understood exactly her position in the house, before the morning meal was over; who she was, and very nearly how she was regarded by every member of the family.

Days and weeks went by, and though Philip Casā often listened to Gertrude's singing, and always saw her at the table, he found no opportunity to address her alone, or make her acquaintance ever so slightly, and thus pave the way for a nearer acquaintance. She scarcely looked at him, answering briefly any remark he chanced to make her, and if they met, she passed him quickly, his courteous greeting returned with a bare inclination of the head. It was most exasperating to this fervid-tempered man to be held at such distance by a mere girl. More exasperating from the fact, that she did not repulse him, she simply did not think of him. He doubted if she remembered his name, knew his stature, or the color of his complexion; but he was wrong there. Gertrude had marked every outline of

his stately form and haughty face, his grand head with its closely cut black hair, and the heavy moustache quite concealing the cruel mouth. She had not missed a line, nor failed to read aright the spirit that animated the magnificent temple ; and without seeking for the reason why she dreaded him as an assured evil.

"I must speak with her," he soliloquized one night after retiring to his chamber. His visit had reached its utmost limit, and he had not been able to reach the girl, by more than the ordinary courtesies, without betraying his purpose to the family in which she lived, and he was not quite ready for this step.

"I must speak with her, and find what to do with this bewildering muddle. The shy little witch, her very unconsciousness, is at once my delight and torture." He paced his room with quick steps as though he would outwalk his emotions.

"Pshaw !" he muttered, again giving voice to his thoughts. "Why need I fear rejection?" and he smiled at the idea of Philip Casā, the elegant man of the world, backed by his wealth, rejected by a governess. "But then she is not like other women." So he fell to walking and thinking again.

"My mind is made up," he resumed to himself at last. "She is lovely, cultured, and as well bred as the best, and I love her to madness. I wedded once to please my father, I will wed now to please myself."

Full of these musings he lay down, but not to sleep.

- With the first light of day, he sprang from his bed, and threw open the window to cool his fevered blood in the frosty November air. Why did he start, and then hurry to dress himself, though with more than his usual care, then hasten out, and take his way down the broad avenue?

Flitting in and out among the nearly leafless shrubbery, he caught the glimpse of a graceful form, and it required no second glance to assure him it was she who now filled all his thoughts. He hastened along, and soon came in sight of Gertrude, walking slowly over the crisp and frosty grass.

He had no time to lose, for an opportunity like the present might never occur again. A few hasty steps brought him to her side; he forced himself to speak calmly, and with his usual graceful ease, though his brain was in a whirl, and he could scarcely restrain his impetuosity when Gertrude turned her fair face towards him, glowing with early exercise, her red, red lips parted, and her large eyes startled out of their usual downward bend, were thrown full on his in questioning surprise. She could not fail to read the ardent admiration expressed, but after the first momentary confusion, and she found there was no retreat, no escape, she returned his greeting with an ease worthy of Alice Vernon even. After one or two indifferent

remarks, Don Philip spoke of the subject nearest his heart.

In impassioned eloquence he urged his suit. He told her, how, since the first moment he listened to her voice, before even he had seen her face, he loved her; how since that hour, his love had grown, until she alone, sleeping or waking, in daylight or dreams, filled every sense, possessed every thought. That daily, hourly, he had watched for a glance or a word from her that might give him hope, but received none; and as the days and weeks went by he had sought for an opportunity to tell her his love; but circumstances had baffled him in every effort.

He told her of an early uncongenial marriage, forced upon him by an ambitious father, of the death of his wife and parents, and his wandering since in search of happiness; that she had dawned upon his aimless life like a vision of joy, and he entreated her with all the earnestness he felt, to become his wife, and make beautiful the now lonely but magnificent home he could give her. "All that I have, fairest Gertrude, he urged, of wealth, rank, an untarnished name, and a fervent devoted love, I lay at your feet." His pleading eyes, his tremulous lips attested his sincerity.

What could the frightened girl say. He had spoken so rapidly, she could only listen, but she could not see the proud man humble himself to her, or plead a hope-

less cause, with indifference. She knew not how to answer without wounding his self-love bitterly. Pain she must give him. She commenced, stammered, and finally broke down; then out of pity for him, and vexation at her want of tact, burst into tears.

"My angel!" cried Don Philip, who had been watching her with bated breath, "forgive my abruptness! take all the time you desire to think, weeks, months. I will wait, wait patiently, only give me a word of hope that by and by you will try and love me."

Gertrude saw that her silence and agitation had given him a wrong impression; this must be righted at once. Steadying her voice, she thanked him for the great honor done her, but begged him to understand she could not accept him. She was sure he would forget her soon, she was so insignificant compared with him. She would think of him kindly while she lived, but could never, never love him. She grew calmer while she went on, and without looking at him turned towards the house.

Don Philip was astounded. Did he hear aright? Could it be possible this girl, this governess had, without a moment's hesitation refused *him*? These questions for one brief instant, then the overwhelming thought that she was not for him, that the delicious hopes he had entertained were dissolving in a breath before his eyes. Springing to her side again, he

besought her to think before deciding. "Save me," he pleaded, "from a lonely, loveless life, tortured by the memory of a beautiful impossibility, do not refuse me without considering my petition that I submit with all humility."

But Gertrude had regained her composure, and quietly replied that she needed no time to think, her answer must always be the same.

Don Philip was a true mannered gentleman, and he did not forget it even now. He saw how useless it would be to say more at present, so he accompanied the lady to the house, in silence, for he was too deeply moved to speak indifferently, and leaving her in the hall, with a courteous "good morning," proceeded to his room.

At the breakfast table he announced his intention of returning to the city by the first train in the afternoon, and proceed from there directly home. To the urgent entreaty for a longer stay, he promised to return in the spring or early summer. He cast a momentary glance at the governess, but her gentle face bent over her plate with no sign of consciousness.

"If her heart is not steel, I will melt it yet," was his inward comment.

Six months passed away, and in early June, Don Philip, true to his word, returned to the "Rocks." He had travelled from city to city through the south,

plunging into all kinds of gay dissipation, hoping to drive from his mind the pretty Gertrude, but to no purpose. His love had grown intenser in his absence, and he came back with the determination to win her by some means, fair or foul. His close espionage of the girl discovered an important fact; he became assured that he had a rival, and this rival none other than his young friend Percy. •

To break up this affair, he now set himself seriously to consider the surest and wisest course. Surest, to utterly separate them, wisest, that himself should never be suspected.

His first step was in a most considerate manner, to point out the young man's entanglement to his mother. The proud woman was incredulous at first. It could not be. What her son! her handsome brilliant Percy, heir in his own right to a million, stoop to marry a servant. O, there must be some mistake! But when she became convinced beyond a doubt, and learned to read signs like large print, signs that were unnoticed because an unknown language until she held the key, her chagrin was unbounded, and she readily listened to the proposal of Percy's most disinterested friend, to get the youth to Europe for two or three years, run in company with Don Philip, and then she could use whatever means she thought proper to dispose of the offending girl. There was no punishment she did not deserve, so

the mother reasoned, for daring to lift her eyes to a Vernon. But in the meantime, so the wily counsellor advised, the lady must hide her indignation, and until her boy was safely on the ocean, must treat the presumptuous girl with her usual kindness.

The truth was, Philip Casā had no intention of having the sweet presence sent from the house while he remained, nor could he consent to have her sensitive nature wounded by slight or coldness, until it should be necessary, in order to drive her to his arms.

You see he was not prepared for the ultimate step of the fond young things. He did not suppose Percy would dare, under his peculiar circumstances, to propose, or Gertrude dare accept a secret marriage. But at the last moment, a word or look, or a something he could not name, perhaps it was the conviction of what he would do were he in Percy's place, gave him the thought, and from the thought the clue — but too late, too late to be of use. He could only shut his teeth in rage and construct anew his schemes.

It was past two o'clock, and one by one the lights have gone out in the lordly mansion, for the guests have departed, and the wearied inmates have sought repose. No, not all. In the silken-lined boudoir of Mrs. Vernon, the heavy curtains drawn, the lights subdued in their rosy shades, remained two persons. Still in her festive robes, her hands dropped by her side, her

features white with anger and alarm, and eyes wide in astonishment, fixed on the dark, set face of the Cuban, who stood leaning by the mantle. At last she found voice to say, —

“What is this you tell me, Philip Casā, my son married this night in yonder church, to that creature?” She almost hissed the words from her closed teeth.

“It was even so, madam. I had no tangible reason for my suspicion, yet I took my way to the church, and arrived just as the ceremony was concluded. Of course I could do nothing, and I would not trouble you until your guests were gone,” and here his brow grew black as his jealous, bitter soul finished the sentence, but arrested his tongue.

Clinching her hands until the nails penetrated the delicate flesh, the lady turned towards the door.

“What would you do, madam?” and Don Philip stepped before her.

“Let me pass! I would send that vile baggage to the street, and let the ungrateful boy follow her if he will, and see how he will support the dainty minx!”

“Dear madam, listen to me one moment.” The gentleman’s voice was low, and his brow composed. His plans were matured in the brief interval he had been listening, for he felt sure of any assistance he might desire.

"Why should I listen to you!" replied Mrs. Vernon, pacing the room with sweeping steps, clasping and unclasping her hands in restless rage. "It is too late to save my boy from disgrace! O, if I had sent the artful creature away when I first learned of his shameful infatuation! but it is too late to save him!" and bursting into tears of rage and grief, she sank sobbing into a seat.

Don Philip waited patiently until the violence of her emotion was spent, then in respectful tones, and with a tender sympathetic manner he could so well assume, begged her to listen to his plan. "When I reached the church I found the ceremony just concluded, as I before stated. Your son is of age and the lady is his wife, and can claim his protection in spite of all you can do; and Percy at this stage of affairs would leave everything for her. In three years, if I am rightly informed, he comes into undisputed possession of a large fortune, and all you can ever do is to accept her, —"

"Never, never!" interrupted the listener.

"Become reconciled, or live a sad life, estranged from your idolized son."

"O Percy! my poor foolish boy!" again sobbed the mother.

Again Don Philip waited. His own heart was like a seething cauldron in its tumult of love, hate, and jealousy, but he could not find relief in tears, like a

woman ; he contemptuously mused, the very intensity of his emotions held him quiet, so he waited. At length ;

“ Were they to know you are aware of the marriage, or even of their attachment, it would be impossible to restore my young friend untrammelled to you and to society, without doing violence to your feelings and to his ; but I think I can point out a course which can be safely followed, without injury to any one save the unhappy girl who has deluded Percy to this unwise step.”

The lady who had by this time so far regained her composure, as to restrain all outward sign, save the unnatural whiteness of her cheeks, now turned an inquiring look towards the gentleman, who again paused as for permission to proceed.

“ I am quite calm, Don Casā, and will listen to whatever you have to propose. Forgive me, if for the first moments I could not control my grief and disappointment, at the dreadful news you brought me.”

“ And no wonder, dear lady ; I sympathize most deeply with you, yet the measures I have to submit to your consideration, I fear, will seem stern and even cruel, but in an instance like the present, none but stern measures will answer. Are you prepared to act an evil part that good may follow ? ”

The heart of the beautiful woman answered, I could

murder if need be, and the quick reader beside her of the human face, so understood the swift passing expression, but he only recognized the answer that passed her lips.

"I am prepared for any act that will save my son from this hateful misalliance!"

Philip Cass drew a seat near the lady, and proceeded to unfold the scheme his subtle brain had conceived. He was not interrupted by a word; but the intense regard and vindictive glance in the bright gleaming eyes fixed on his, and the occasional impatient motion of the hand for him to go on, when he paused to see if he was fully comprehended, satisfied him he had a ready assistant in the stately woman by his side.

For an hour longer they conversed, a low, eager and absorbed converse, and when they separated, they understood fully what each had to do. Yes. But that each understood the other, scarcely. The motive of the lady was plain enough, and she thought that of her dark browed confederate, a disinterested concern for the brother of his future wife; could she have been able to read clairvoyantly his subtle mind, she might have drawn back affrighted at the picture. A fierce burning love growing with the obstacles it met, until all just considerations were lost in its mightiness. An ungovernable hate for Percy, a gnawing envy at his

success, jealousy, and a wild desire for revenge, for he knew not what, created a hell within. Yet he was apparently calm, calm outwardly, as the southern ocean is stillest while the elements are gathering for their wildest storm.



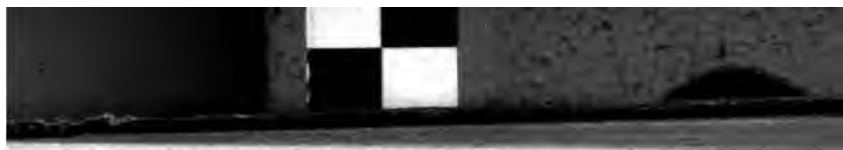
CHAPTER III.

IT WORKS WELL.

"Dread closed huge and vague about her,
And her thoughts turned fearfully
To her heart, if there some shelter
From the silence there might be,
Like bare cedars leaning inward
From the blighting of the sea." — LOWELL.

IT was the intention of the young men to start for New York, the next morning early, as their passage had been secured in the steamer that sailed the 30th, a day later; but before the light of another day dawned fully, there were hurrying feet within the late festive mansion, startled looks, and whisperings of fear. A servant rode away with all speed for a physician; while the family was gathered around the bedside of little Helen, the household fairy who lay tossing in delirium of fever.

She had been ailing slightly for a day or two, though nothing serious was apprehended — still when the little maiden felt too unwell to go down to her brother's farewell party — even after being dressed; her mother grew anxious, and her father refused to leave her until quite late, she fell into a quiet slumber, or it seemed so to him. Gertrude came in soon after Mr. Vernon



went out, and finding Helen hot and restless, bathed her face and hands, and gave her a cooling drink, then sat by the window until the house grew quiet; she was sleeping there when Mrs. Vernon came in, previous to her interview with the Cuban.

"You had better retire," she said, "Helen seems sleeping now," and Gertrude did so, and lay, until from the adjoining room, the incoherent murmurings of the sick child assured her the little thing was growing worse; then she hastily summoned the parents, but their darling did not know them.

Of course the proposed voyage was put off for an indefinite time, and it was not until after the lapse of two weeks, when the little one was pronounced out of danger, that the subject of the journey was again resumed.

Through the two long weeks, day and night, scarcely allowing herself sleep of an hour's duration, Gertrude watched by the sick bed of her pupil, all thought of self was put by, in her anxiety for the child she so dearly loved. Percy was constantly by her side, almost glad for the delay, though he tenderly loved his little sister, yet the hours he spent with his lovely wife—of whom he grew fonder every day—were so sweet that he was half determined to postpone his tour until he could take her with him. If he had only done so! Ah if he only had!

Prudence, however, urged the folly of such a course, and Prudence seldom errs, though after taking the first step against the old lady's warning, Percy should have stood by his bride in spite of her after-whispers, and so he would had he dreamed their precious secret was a secret no longer. He would have defied them all for the dear one who had trusted him. But the future looked so rosy, he had no misgivings, and at the expiration of four weeks from the date of his marriage, he sailed, and nothing occurred the second time to interrupt the half regretted voyage.

Mrs. Vernon had been able so far to dissemble her anger towards Gertrude, that she treated her nearly the same as ever, except, perhaps, an increased avoidance of her, or an increased coldness of tone, when speaking was unavoidable; and though this distressed the poor girl momentarily, it did not render her unhappy. Mr. Vernon, always fond of her, could not do enough to show his appreciation of her care for his "little sunbeam," as he fondly called his daughter Helen. Even the naturally scornful Alice kissed her with almost tenderness when the crisis was passed, and told her, they owed their darling's life to her.

Helen had always been fond of her governess, who being but three years the elder, was a companion as well as teacher; but now her affection was unbounded. She would not allow Gertrude from her sight, and



from no other hand would she receive her medicine. Beneath the influence of her magic voice the moans of the little sufferer would cease, and at her soft touch the burning eyes would close, and the restless limbs become quiet.

When Helen became convalescent, the first use she made of her strength was to urge her papa to adopt her gentle nurse as a "truly daughter"; and he, humane, rich and indulgent, would have complied, had no other will interfered; but at the first intimation of the matter to Mrs. Vernon, she was so decided and indignant in her refusal, that both father and daughter saw the futility of their hopes. Of course Gertrude knew nothing of all this, so Helen was fain to content herself by heaping upon her costly presents of every description, all of which Gertrude firmly declined, excepting only a chain of exquisite workmanship, which Mr. Vernon ordered made, with Helen's name engraved on the clasp, and a tress of Helen's chestnut hair running through every link. The child begged so earnestly for her governess to accept just this, that she could not refuse, and so attached her one jewel of value, a ruby cross, to the pretty thing, declared she would always wear it around her neck.

Mrs. Vernon regarded this growing attachment with more indifference than she would have done, were it not, that the time for her to commence her nefarious work was near at hand.

Letters from abroad were frequent, and evidently written in high spirits and keen enjoyment, for all seen and heard. Those to Gertrude, — which she received every mail, — were at first, and for several weeks, like himself; ardent and loving — breathing through every line, the most devoted affection. Gradually however, they seemed to change, almost imperceptibly at first, but as the summer wore on they came less and less often, and one by one she missed the old endearing names, and the tender playful terms that sounded so like her Percy. Finally as the months wore away, he wrote more of the society he frequented, and the beautiful high-bred women he met, and to dwell less and less on their own personal affairs.

Autumn with her mature glories spread over the land, and with the falling leaf Gertrude faded slowly. She grew so fragile, so still and silent, and, poor suffering child, she shrank from all notice as a guilty thing. She sang now only when compelled, and her tones were so wailing sad, such a wild heartsore pathos in every note that her hearers wondered, remarked, then grew solicitous. There was one who watched her closely, and her listless air, her large sad eyes seemed so heavy with unshed tears, that even the cruel heart of her destroyer was touched, still with no thought of relenting from her wicked purpose, but to hurry on the crisis without delay.

Mrs. Vernon spoke frequently in Gertrude's hearing, of a lovely girl of high rank whom Percy seemed to admire very ardently, and who returned his partiality. She said Don Philip had much to say in every letter, of the evident attachment growing up between the young people, though Percy himself had only casually mentioned her.

Gertrude went herself to the city whenever she expected a letter, and which at long intervals still arrived. But again their tone had changed. Obscure hints at wrong done her, pleadings of wayward passion, of remorse of injuries done her in a thoughtless moment; all of course incomprehensible to the mind of the unhappy girl, and filled her with vague terror.

The family was assembled at the breakfast table one morning in November, when the mail bag was brought in. Mr. Vernon distributed the contents to each member.

"Ah, Mrs. Vernon, you are fortunate," he said, passing her two letters with foreign postmark. "One for you, Alice, from your Spanish Nabob, I suppose," he continued, smiling slyly at his daughter's glowing cheek as she received it. "One for you, Miss Lester," handing Gertrude a large letter, the superscription in an old fashioned upright hand. She laid it by her plate, but seeing Mrs. Vernon regarding it with apparent curiosity entirely unlike her, she said,—

"It is from my Aunt Rebecca Adams, the only sister of my mother, and living in New Hampshire."

Mrs. Vernon made no reply, gave attention while Gertrude was speaking, then she proceeded to unfold, and read her letters. A well affected start of surprise at first, and a slight exclamation, then she finished her letter without farther comment; after—looking up with a flutter of well acted pleasure, she said—

"I have some rare news for you, listen, I will read though it is only for the ears of the family at present." Gertrude made a motion to leave the table, but the lady detained her.

"Stay," and her manner was kinder than usual, "you must hear our pleasant news, for you are one of the family you know." None read the biting sarcasm in the silky voice, or the gleam of deadly purpose in the large eyes, velvety in their softness. Looking over the letter she read :

"One thing, dearest mother, I have to tell you, and which I am sure you will be pleased to learn, for it is a vital matter to me. I have written to you before of the Lady Ada Culdre, her wit, her grace, her superb loveliness, but I have not told how madly I have learned to love her, and last night I heard from her own sweet lips that I am beloved in return. So you see, my lady mother, your fondest hopes are likely to be realized, and you may soon welcome as a daughter, a Peeress of England."



After the first sentence, Gertrude listened without life, it seemed. She grew so white, O, so lily white, that every drop of blood seemed to press around her heart. Her eyes were fixed upon her plate, and she sat without sense or motion until after the lady ceased to read, and while the various comments were passing from lip to lip, then she compelled herself to leave the table with steady steps; compelled her stiffened lips to frame an excuse. She reached her own room, locked the door, and with a low groan sank to the floor.

How long she lay thus she knew not, she did not measure time by hours. The sun climbed to the meridian and nearly reached the west, yet she did not stir from her death-like quiet. She heeded not the knocks that came from time to time to her door, she heard not the voice of her beloved pupil entreating to come in. There was only one thought, and that was madness; she was forsaken by Percy, that she was not in reality his wife, but a wretched outcast, a thing hereafter to be scorned and shunned as something vile. Oh, it was terrible! No tears came to her burning eyes, the blessed, soothing influence of tears comes not with grief like hers. The short twilight was gathering in the room, when there came a quick imperative knock, and a low but distinct voice made itself heard.

"Gertrude, my child, let me come in!" Mrs. Vernon could afford to be kind, her victim was behaving

remarkably well, making no outcry, no trouble ; but at the command she staggered to her feet and opened the door. The lady entered and closed it.

"Are you sick, dear? that you keep your room all day?"

"Yes ma'am, that is, I do not feel as well as usual." The sweet voice sounded strangely hollow. Mrs. Vernon drew her to the window, and as the light fell on the haggard face, her heart smote her, but she did not relent or falter in her purpose for an instant.

"You do look wretched, Gertrude ; your labors have been too severe, you must have a physician and rest." She laid her soft hand on the hot head bent against the window case.

"Thank you, madam," replied Gertrude, in the same listless, hollow tone, "I do not want a physician, but I am so weary," her only desire was to be alone. But the lady persisted in a gentle, nay even affectionate manner that was not all pretence.

"You have labored constantly for two years, and have done your duties nobly, you have been a faithful teacher, and friend to our Helen ; I cannot bear to see you suffer without doing something to assist you. Tell me the cause of your trouble, for it is not all illness of body." The lady paused to see the effect of her words. "Tell me why you suffer, let me take the place of your mother, dear child."



For a brief instant the wretched girl resolved to tell the lady everything, but only for an instant. Should she render the mother unhappy with the knowledge of her son's guilt? It would do no good, no good. It would not restore her lost faith, or the lost love of her destroyer. It would not restore her lost purity, her unsullied name. She might meet with pity, she would also meet with contempt, and perhaps, alas! she deserved it, for daring to steal unwelcomed into a family so far above her. No! she would hide her shame and misery in her own heart. You see the idea of revenge never entered the mind of this wronged child, or the plotters might have found a more difficult task.

Mrs. Vernon was prepared, should Gertrude yield to her entreaties, and unbosom herself; but she was infinitely relieved that the poor girl was so reticent, seeing that she did not speak, the lady went on.

"Is there no place where you would like to go, during the coming holidays? no friends among your schoolmates whom you would like to visit? if there is, although we should miss you, I will let you go, and your salary may go on just the same, until you choose to return."

Gertrude knew she must go away, and that soon; but as to coming back again, that she knew was out of the question. She thought of her kind old aunt, and while the lady waited for a reply, her mind was made up.

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Vernon, I will accept your permission to go away. I will go to the city to-night in the seven o'clock train, and by taking the nine o'clock train from there, I think I shall be able to reach my aunt's house, or within a few miles of it, in the evening of to-morrow."

Mrs. Vernon was delighted with the success of her plot. "It works admirably," was her triumphant thought. Did the artful woman intend to receive the poor deluded girl again into her family? Not by any means. If she offered to return, Helen should be sent to a boarding-school, so as to render her return unnecessary; but she read her dupe too truly, to fear such a contingency. She was gentleness itself, but as proud as a Vernon.

"You had better not go to-night, wait until your health is improved, then make suitable preparations."

"O no!" replied Gertrude, almost with impatience, "I shall not require much time to prepare."

"Very well, I shall be glad to hear from you when you reach your destination, but you had better not write to Helen, it will only keep her grieving for you, and perhaps interrupt your visit; and I would rather you would not let her know you are going, for she will be half frantic about it, she is so fond of you."

This was enough for Gertrude.

"It shall be as you say, Mrs. Vernon;" and as the door closed, she commenced to make a few simple preparations for her departure.



“Oh, if I could but die! if I could but die!” was the constantly recurring thought and wish. But she lived, and so must act, with a clutching pain at her heart, a leaden weight upon her brain, she went on with her task. She had no plans, no thought of future days, her only desire was to get as far as possible from the scene of her weakness and misery.

When Mrs. Vernon entered the dining room, where the table was laid for dinner, Helen ran eagerly towards her.

“Dear mamma, is Gerty sick? why don’t she come down? may I go up to her?”

One question at a time, my darling. No, she is not sick, she had some bad news this morning, and rather not come down, and I would not distress her farther by intruding, when she wishes to be alone.”

“Well, let me send Matty with some dinner.”

“Yes, you may send Matty with the tray, if you wish.”

Helen flew to order the tray of goodies temptingly arranged by her own little hands, and with many messages of love to her friend, she sent the girl away.

In the meantime Mrs. Vernon readily answered her husband as they gathered around the table.

“I am sorry to say Gertrude has become entangled with a worthless person, whom she first met at school; he has recently learned of her whereabouts, and has been writing to her, and she has met him in the city

several times. Finally, she has decided to marry him. I said all that I felt it my duty, to persuade her to a contrary course, and she has promised to reconsider, but the foolish girl seems bewitched."

"Well, mamma, why should you care," indolently remarked the fair Alice; "let her marry whom she will."

"I promised her mother, when she was dying, to counsel and care for her child; she warned me of this very person, as a possible danger."

"You never mentioned this before," said Mr. Vernon in some surprise.

"No, I did not think it advisable until the suitor made his appearance," replied the wife.

"But who is he, and what is his name?" persisted the gentleman, "perhaps we could make something of him yet, if our Gertrude really is determined in her choice."

"Why," and the lady paused, as though thinking, "I do not recall his name, but I will learn in the morning."

Helen coming in at this moment, the subject was suffered to drop.

"Come, mamma, we shall miss the train," said Alice, an hour later, entering the parlor in a most becoming costume, as her mother who had been again to see Gertrude, entered by another door.

"I am all ready, but putting on my wrappers. Where is your father, and Helen?"

"They are on the Veranda, and the carriage is at the door."

"Very well; give me my cloak, Annette," and receiving the garment from her maid's hands, and giving a glance of pardonable pride at the mirror, she followed her daughter to the carriage. Helen was already inside; she was to visit the theatre for the first time in her little life, and she was in a flutter of spirits, sighing occasionally, and wishing Gerty was with them. The happy child little dreamed of the wretchedness and woe that would henceforth guard the steps of her lovely friend.

The next morning Gertrude not making her appearance, a servant was despatched to her room. Not receiving an answer to her knock, she tried the door, and found it unlocked. The room was without occupant, but a letter lay on the table directed to Mrs. Vernon, which the servant conveyed to her mistress, who dismissing the wondering maid, read, and passed it to her husband. It ran thus:

"MRS. VERNON: I have thought much of what you said to me yesterday, but cannot bring myself to renounce the only man I can ever love, and who I believe sincerely loves me, in spite of his many faults. I cannot accept your well-meant advice, and think it better to leave while you are away.

Very Respectfully,

G. L."

A shade of deep, painful surprise stole over the fine face of Mr. Vernon, as he finished perusing the note, and returned it to his wife.

"I am sorry, so sorry," he repeated; "that does not sound like Gerty."

"She has proved to be just the weak creature I always thought her," replied Mrs. Vernon; "I had a better opportunity of observing her than you could have. Her education did much towards improving her, but the true metal will wear to the surface, gild it as you will."

Mr. Vernon did not reply; but many times during the day, and for many days and weeks after, his mind would turn to poor Gertrude, and he would repeat,—
"I am sorry, I am so sorry."

He had felt more than a patron's interest in the gentle orphan; he had seen her grow from an engaging child to a polished, cultured woman. True, she conversed rarely; this was one reason it was so difficult to reconcile her naturally shy demeanor with the coarse conduct of her later acts. He mused upon the matter oftener than he was aware, but generally threw it from his thoughts, with—"Pshaw, women are a queer compound, a queer compound." He missed her sadly, too; at the hush of evening, when her glorious voice had been wont to fill the house with harmony, at the table, in the carriage, in fact, every hour when at home, he

missed the gentle step, and sweet face of his child's governess; and could that proud man have known the truth, he would have gladly welcomed to his arms his son's wife.

When Helen found her governess was gone, her frantic grief knew no bounds; and it was a long time before she would listen to a word of comfort; and for many succeeding nights she sobbed herself to sleep. The beautiful girl had at once been her companion, friend and guide. She had supplied the place of her worldly, fashionable mother, and her vain, indolent sister.

Helen possessed, in a large degree, the warm, impassioned, truthful nature of her brother, and she intuitively understood — child though she was — all the finer, purer traits of Gertrude's character, and she *could no more* than her father, reconcile the apparent inconsistency of her conduct, and often, as she grew towards womanhood, and in after years, she would wonder with tender regret, what could have been the fate of her early idolized friend.

All the inmates of the Vernon mansion, if we except one — regretted the departure of the sweet young lady, as the servants all called her. Alice missed her exquisite taste in arranging the dresses, in which to array her queenly figure. Then she really liked Gertrude in her indolent fashion.

But Mrs. Vernon was truly glad when the girl was gone, and with a sigh of relief she remembered her unholy work was almost completed. True, she had found less trouble than she expected, in encompassing her desire. Sometimes a sharp thrill would contract her guilty heart, when she wondered what would be the effect on her son, and the consequence, if, by any chance, all should be discovered. She did not much fear the latter; her plans had been too well laid, and she reasoned after Don Philip—that a few years' intercourse with the brilliant world in which he moved, would serve to obliterate any affections he might have cherished for his sister's governess, when he should find her false to her marriage vows; therefore, with undisturbed conscience she prepared to finish her work. It had required constant care and watchfulness to intercept every letter, and in this she was obliged to have the assistance of a young man in the post office; but liberal pay secured that. Every letter that Gertrude penned, passed into her hands, and she would write, and send another in its place; for she was no indolent plotter, and would trust to no second accomplice, so her first step in the drama of fraud, was to practice writing after Percy and Gertrude, until she could accomplish a letter for either without fear of detection.

Late, the night after Gertrude's departure, Mrs. Vernon was alone in her boudoir. Seated before an

elegant trifle of a writing table, her cheek resting in her hand, her thoughts going backward unpleasantly. At last, rousing herself, she dipped her pen in the ink — murmuring under her breath :

“I wish I could get that stony face, with its wild, wide eyes, out of my sight; how hollow her voice sounded; I don’t think she shed a tear. Fie, she will get over it.”

She commenced her letter, but soon paused again.

“Why should I care, why let it trouble me? She is no doubt, safe at home with her aunt, by this time; common people think nothing of such things, and should they feel disposed to complain, a few hundred dollars will make it all right. She is fitly punished for her presumption. I could not do otherwise, ‘the end justifies the means,’ I will not think of it again.”

The lady wrote rapidly for some time, and then paused, to peruse that which she had written. “I think that will do,” and a look of satisfaction lighted up her countenance. “He will not suppose there is any design in this, but merely an item of news from home, and I trust this letter completes the tiresome business.”

Ay, woman! it did as far as your labors went; it did more, as you will learn to your cost. It ends the suspense in which your boy has been living, for the last four months, but with that, ends every hope or desire of life. You have succeeded, and wrenched the be-

loved wife from his heart, but left it bleeding and torn with wounds, that time can never heal; nothing save the discovery of your crime will bring him peace, and for all he will ever be to you or your ambition, the grave might as well close over him.





LOST.

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CHAPTER IV.

LOST.

"Well I have left upon your mouth
The seal I know must burn there yet,
My claim is set upon your Youth;
My Sign upon your soul is set;—
Dare you forgot?"—OWEN MEREDITH.



CROSS the sea to grand old England, we will touch upon thy shores, for a glance at our wanderers. Beautiful land, why is it I so often dream of thee, and muse upon thy grandeur in fond delight. Why of all countries, do I look to a possible future, when in something more than song or story, I shall visit thy shores? It may be, that the blood of the father bounds unadulterated through my heart, and draws his child to his native land. Be it as it may, whatever is dark or sorrowful in my life, is forgotten, when I dwell on the fair pictures of smiling landscapes, peaceful homes, and old castles, moss-grown and gray, built in far-off ages. Of the shadowy undulating parks, the graceful bounding deer, and birds of sweet notes; the woody hills, the cool green slopes, and winding silvery streams; all have a charm for me I cannot find in contemplating all the wonders and storied beauties of other lands.

Percy Vernon yet lingered in the British dominion. Letters he carried gave him entrée to families of rank and power, had not his cousinship been sufficient passport. His handsome person, pleasing manners, and rare conversational gift, won him a host of friends. Most of the summer had been spent among the wild, picturesque mountains of Scotland; later, he traversed Ireland, visiting whatever could interest or amuse, and after loitering some weeks, roaming through England, enjoying the hospitality of its liberal homes, he with growing unrest returned to the capital.

His letters from home had been frequent, but those from Gertrude after the first few weeks, were irregular, and when they did come, were constrained and unnatural. The phrases of affection even, seemed vague and set, as though they were the proper things to say on the occasion, instead of springing from a young, warm heart overflowing with love for him. There was no regret expressed for his absence, no wishing for his return, and had it not been for the writing, and now and then a word of some matter which he supposed known only to themselves, he could not have believed it the spirit of his beloved wife breathing through the lines. It made no change in him, however; on the contrary his love grew deeper as the months rolled on, and a dreamy, tender longing to see her grew upon him. The constrained and formal letters he received, formed

no connecting link between him and the bright creature he left at home.

In the gayest scenes, among the fairest ladies of the land, or with men brilliant for wit or learning, she was ever before him, her haunting eyes with ever a look of sorrowful entreaty in their depths, her wondrous voice, and the shy, witching grace that made her seem half child, half woman.

He would go home, he said in thought again and again, he would remain away from her no longer. He would declare their marriage, and abide the consequences.

Was it that marvellous thing so little understood, yet so real, and latent in the divine part of man? I mean the mind telegraphy, that between souls in perfect rapport, exhibit such wondrous power. Who can tell? Enough that he received every message sent, but failed to read them aright. Every cry for his return was responded to with a fervid desire to go; every sigh found its echo from his lips; and the culminating woe of that innocent wife, gathered pall-like above and around him, without a glimmer of light except oceanward, thus forcing him in that direction for escape.

With this final resolve, November found him in London. He did not wish to inform Don Philip of his intention until the very last hours of his stay, and

though he was resolved to go, yet he had not settled on the date; this was to be determined on the arrival of the American mails, which brought letters from home, but not one from Gertrude. Six weeks had passed since he had received a line from her, therefore he resolved to return the next steamer.

As may be supposed, Philip Casā was dismayed. He tried all arguments to prevent the catastrophe, but in vain. He urged the beauties and enjoyments of the places they had designed to visit, protested against giving up these pleasures. Percy replied:

"Pardon me, Don Philip, for causing you disappointment. I will come again next year, but I must go home in the next steamer!"

Don Philip then tried ridicule, but with the same success. Percy, usually so careless and compliant, was firm as a rock.

"I shall go home in the next steamer, but do not let my apparently whimsical change, disarrange your plans; if I am alive in the spring, I will join you wherever you may be."

The Cuban apparently acquiesced in the arrangement, though he had no intention of permitting his friend to go, even if it were necessary to constrain him by sickness, an art Don Philip well understood; but he hoped to avoid extreme measures. The next mail ought to bring the expected news, if the postscript of



Percy's last letter should have the desired effect ; and that postscript, it is needless to say, was penned by Don Casā himself.

It was the morning of the last day that Percy intended to remain in England. The young men were at breakfast, in their own pleasant parlor ; both were silent. Percy busy with his thoughts, half of pleasure, half of fear, and his companion appearing to read the morning paper, though not comprehending a sentence. He was nervously waiting the postman, anxiously waiting, yet dreading the result of the letters due from New York.

The mail came at last, but among the number of letters received, Percy did not find the one he most wished to see. There was one from his mother, and he eagerly opened it.

He perused the letter quietly enough ; nothing of moment was there, that the dark, baleful eyes that were covertly watching him could learn. Stay, there was a postscript, a few words, a line or so. Why did the reader start and turn so pale ? read it again with strained eyes, then rising to his feet and taking a step forward, as though dazed, sink with a low groan, the wail of a breaking heart, without life or motion, to the floor.

Don Philip was beside him instantly, and though a gleam of dark satisfaction flashed across his face, he

raised the rigid form carefully, and placed it on the bed in an adjoining room, and proceeded to apply restoratives. For a long time he bent over his victim, chafing his hands and temples, and using various means to restore animation, but without success; he remained without sense or motion, and Don Philip, fearing the worst, despatched a servant for a physician; then returning to the bedside, continued his efforts. At last a faint motion stirred beneath his hand, that lay upon the poor heart he had so cruelly outraged.

When the physician arrived, the throb of life so nearly extinct, was faintly beating backward into existence. For many hours the humane physician sat by the bedside. Very gradually the breathing grew regular, the muscles relaxed, and warmth returned to the limbs, but not with these came the light of reason to the glazed eyes.

He noticed no one who stood by his bed, nor seemed to realize his situation, but a low, continual moan betrayed the mind conscious of its woe. The medicine that had been administered, at last produced effect, and the patient sank into a deep sleep. The doctor then endeavored to learn from Don Philip the cause of this sudden illness.

The Cuban was, of course, unconscious of the cause, or appeared so. Said the physician —

"I should think he had received some terrible mental shock; it appears more like that than physical prostration."

"He was reading letters from home when he was seized, but mine from the same place, contained nothing of an unusual nature, therefore I cannot account for his illness in that way."

The old gentleman shook his head.

"I have been in practice forty years, and I never knew a case like this to spring from a physical cause."

"Do you think him in any danger?" asked the Cuban.

"Not at present, certainly," and giving some minute directions, he promised to call again in a few hours.

After he had gone, Philip Casā gathered up the unopened letters, and folding the one which had borne such foul news, laid them carefully away, and prepared to answer his own letters, which, however, did not contain a word of the matter that had such terrible effect on Percy. His correspondent was too astute for that, and in the same wise spirit, without hinting at what might have been the cause, he described the sudden illness of her son to Mrs. Vernon; but also the declaration of the attending physician, that he was in no particular danger, and would soon be as well as ever; for the last assertion, the Cuban assumed the responsibility.

It was several weeks, however, before Percy recovered. With untiring care Don Casā attended him, barely allowing himself proper repose. With his own hands he administered the medicines, and kept the friends near and far advised of his progress; and it was not until reason had fully resumed its sway, and the patient was in fair way of recovery, that the attentive friend gave himself time for rest sufficient for nature's requirements, and exercise in the open air.

With the return of reason, came the bitter remembrance of his loss, and what he believed to be the cruel desertion of his idolized young wife; but not by a word did he refer to his sickness or its cause. Not for the world would he have his titled, and rather satirical friend know of his unfortunate attachment. He would hide in his own bosom his sufferings, and endure in secret the punishment due to his impetuous folly.

You see how analogous the reasoning of the unfortunate lovers. No desire for revenge, their love was too unselfish, no desire for sympathy, their love was too sacred; the only wish of each was to hide their shame and grief, and be let alone.

For hours he would sit without uttering a word, or appearing conscious of any presence, and when he became able to go out, would wander away alone, and dwell on his wretched fate. He would review, again and again, the entire course of his intimacy with Ger-

trude, from a child to a woman ; and in that long sweet friendship of their childhood, the few delicious months of their engagement, and in the brief, blissful term of their married life, he found no act, or word, or look consistent with her base desertion of her husband, and illicit passion for another.

Sometimes an impulse to fly to his native land, would almost overpower him ; go and seek out the wretched girl and hear from her own lips the story of her perfidy ; but how trace her to her hiding-place, without betraying his own shame and folly to his friends, and his proud heart shrank from acknowledging its love for one so unworthy.

With a fierce restlessness, he longed to wash out the stain upon his honor, with the blood of her paramour ; but was she not equally culpable, and could he raise his hand against that dear head that had lain on his bosom. Turn as he would, there was no hope, no redress in this world. If she had only died, died in her innocence, he could have accepted the sorrowful calamity, and think of her in a purer world, where he might hope to meet her, but now, there was no hope of meeting, no desire, for alas, she never loved him.

Most cunningly had the dark Cuban read his victims, and most cunningly laid his scheme, and well had they been carried into effect, aided by the unscrupulous mother.

They had not diminished in the strength and consistency of affection in one so young as Percy. Philip could well think as he watched him in the first weeks of his agony —

— "Well, the more severe the drama, the sooner it will have its end run."

But as months gathered up the days, and Percy still seemed trapped in his gloom, and resisted every effort his friends made, at various times, to draw him into society — the schemer became impatient.

Never since his recovery, had Percy mentioned the subject of home, neither had he penned a line there, but spent his time within his lodgings, or wandering lonely amid the crowd: sometimes visiting galleries of art, or places of amusement even, but ever alone, ever rapt in silent, unapproachable melancholy; repelling with coldness, almost disdainful, every advancement from those who would have kindly won him from his sorrow.

Once only Don Philip referred directly to his illness and its cause, for Percy manifested a decided unwillingness to approach that subject, and always led the conversation, or the slight converse that answered to conversation now — to something else. This time Don Philip persisted, and Percy, paling and flushing by turns, said:

"Philip, you have, by the kindest care, saved to me

a worthless life, for which you deserve my lasting gratitude, but if you ever refer to this matter again, I shall consider you desire a cessation of friendship, and act accordingly."

The baleful eyes of the Cuban flashed him a look of hate, while a half smile instantly repressed, touched his lip; but subduing a momentary feeling of triumph, he frankly apologized, adding with winning grace, so peculiar to himself:

"But I must protest, Percy, against this joyless, aimless existence you lead. It makes my heart ache to see one I have loved so well, a prey to an unknown sorrow, without being honored even in the least degree with your confidence. For half a year, you have led the life of a hermit amidst a crowd; your health affected, your spirits crushed, and I cannot deny your continual brooding renders me most unhappy. Let me urge you once more to use your naturally strong will and subdue this wasting sorrow, mingle once more in the world's interests; let us renew our travels so unpleasantly interrupted, and in the excitement of journeying among new sights and people, forget this real or imaginary trouble."

Percy sighed deeply, but made no reply, and the speaker went on:

"We have been from home nearly a year, and during the last six months my presence has seemed most disa-

greeable to you. I regretted it, and waited with patience for a change ; but your continued melancholy, and persistent seclusion, has convinced me that it will be more agreeable to you if we separate."

He had touched the right chord at last, for a more generous, unselfish being never lived than Percy Vernon. Turning from the window where he had been listlessly standing, and taking in a warm grasp the hand that had wrought him so much woe, said entreatingly :

"Philip, forgive me! I have been thoughtless and selfish, and forgotten the sacrifice you have continually made for me, and the patience with which you have borne my wayward moods ; but God help me, I cannot do differently." He dropped the hand he held and turned again to the window. His listener waited ; he was wise enough to let the proposal that must be made, come from the other side. Percy resumed :

"It may appear unkind to say, and I ask your pardon for saying it, but all I desire is to be left alone. I shall not yet return to America. I do not know whither my steps will lead me ; but I am no companion for you. Go home, or where you will, but do not let your compassion attach you to a wretched man longer."

Don Philip was delighted. He had quite determined on returning, and had trusted to chance to favor his design, and chance had been more favorable than he

had dared hope ; still he made some demur — “ regrets at leaving his young friend, and so on.”

Percy listened impatiently.

“ Go, go !” he cried, “ and believe me, you are doing me a kindness by leaving me alone !” He stopped, conscious of his rudeness ; but Philip Casā was not disposed to quarrel with the sentence that set him free from an irksome companionship, and leave him unquestioned to seek the fair woman who dwelt ever in his thoughts.

He made haste to be gone, and with the first steamer westward was ploughing the blue waves towards his Island home. Here he made some arrangements he thought necessary, and then, taking with him his son, a fine handsome boy of seven years, he started for New York ; determined to rest day nor night until Gertrude was found.

“ Yes,” he mused, “ she shall learn to love me ; she believes her marriage false, herself defamed, she will listen to my true love, and soon forget that credulous boy, pah ! I could crush his puny heart under my heel for sinking under his supposed shame, without striking a blow in his own defence. To accept her guilt on the evidence of woman or angel even, without standing face to face with her, and wringing the confirmation from her own lips, pah ! the dog-hearted idiot, I could wring his heart for doubting her. The sweet blossom !

I will search the world over but I will find her!" and he did.

Percy, left to himself, yielded more and more to the haunting woe that pursued him; with no companion, but his faithful servant, Willie Earl, he again went to Scotland, and spent the summer and autumn amid its wild, solemn beauties. There as elsewhere, he shunned mankind, and with book or pencil, but as often with only his own sad thoughts, the days went by. He would wander miles and miles together, oftentimes overtaken by night on some mountain steep, or by the margin of some silvery lake, and here bewildered, he would have been obliged to stop, were it not for his faithful William, who was ever near, though unseen, and who would guide him to a hamlet, or herdsman's cottage to pass the night.

As winter drew near, he roused himself from his depression so far as to make preparations to commence his journeyings in earnest. North, South, and to the far East he wandered; many, many years passed away before he again beheld his native land; a weary heart-worn wanderer, old while young, always looking backward towards haunting memories, we will for the present leave him.



CHAPTER V.

"COMMON PEOPLE."

"An industrious life and ample means." — WORDSWORTH.



ON the outskirts of one of those lovely villages so numerous in New England, stood an old fashioned farmhouse, with deep, overhanging gables thickly overgrown with moss, and partially concealed by clinging ivy. Two giant elms at either corner, afforded grateful shelter from the summer sun; but to-day the graceful leaves — brown and sear, were being whirled above the black earth, by the chill autumn winds, and the long, pendulous branches tossed swaying and shrieking against the darkening sky. It had been raining all day long, not the soft, warm rain that nourishes and refreshes, but the cold November rain, that like too often the world's charity, chills all it falls upon.

As night came down, the wind rose higher and higher, until it howled and shrieked as though all the demons of the air were let loose, and the rain rushed down in torrents, ever anon beating the curtainless windows like hail, then as the wind veered a hush would fall, as though the storm had paused to gather new power.

Within the roomy kitchen of that low-roofed dwelling, homely content and plenty reigned. The wide fireplace filled high with crackling logs, shed a cheerful glow through the small-paned windows, out upon the lonely road as though to invite the traveller, if such be abroad, to warmth and shelter.

Louder roared the storm and higher leaped the ruddy blaze, laughing, singing, humming, whispering — until the kettle on the crane commenced to hum and bubble and buzz, as though in sheer rivalry; but the flame only leaped the higher, peeping into the corners of the large room, playing hide and seek with the shadows on the pine floor — scoured snowy white almost — shone on the rows of silvery bright tins, until they grew beautiful under the cheery spell, and flashed back in laughing glee.

On the hearth a huge gray cat nestled with a drowsy purr, and looked the picture of sleepy content. The plain, useful furniture was free from a speck of dust, and the table in the middle of the floor covered with a snow white cloth, was spread for supper.

There was but one inmate of this cheery room, an old lady, long passed middle age, but so upright, so vigorous did she seem, so rosy her cheeks, so bright and kindly her eye, that you would not guess her age by a dozen years. Her abundant gray hair combed back beneath her black lace cap, her dress of some

dark brown stuff, a white linen apron, white and smooth as hand could make it, and a white muslin kerchief folded over her ample bosom, completed her simple and becoming attire.

Her hands usually so busy, were folded in her lap, and the half-finished stocking with its polished needles, was suffered to fall at her feet, and the soft, friendly eyes were fixed dreamily on the fire. This was Aunt Rebecca Adams, as she was invariably called, the relative with whom poor Gertrude hoped to find a home. Born and brought up in Lincoln, she had never been twenty miles from home in her life, yet unlike too many whose vision of the world is bounded by the narrow circle of domestic duties, her mind had daily expanded with the good work in which she delighted, and her great heart, ever open to the calls of humanity, was still young in spite of her three-score years.

She married, when young, a thrifty farmer; but she laid him to sleep long ago in the village church-yard, together with six children, who had called her mother. She had outlived all her kindred except her sister's child, and the daughter who married, and with her husband took care of Cedar Farm, the latter, however, the old lady was wise enough to keep in her own hands.

She was beloved by the whole village, old, young, wise and simple. Her heart, overflowing with gentle

charity and sympathy, and her lips dropping pity and hope for the erring, and inspiring comfort for those in trouble. She was the receptacle for private griefs or joys, from the care-laden mother with her troop of noisy children, to the blushing maiden with her first love-tale, from the grave-browed man to the laughing-eyed youth just crossing the threshold of manhood — she was counsellor and friend. With plenty of this world's goods, she lived plainly, as we have seen, but to the poor she gave with unsparing hand, and the beggar never left her door unfilled.

How beautiful the aged woman whose character has been distilled from the dregs of crude passions — of all uncharitableness, who has outlived all unloveliness, but not the sweet and holy instincts that lie within all true womanly nature. The girl child is sweet as the rose opening to the sun, its pearly leaves touched with dew; we watch her wilful witcheries and baby charms with loving eyes; and her affectionate caresses given so freely, fearlessly demand a return, until our whole heart goes out in tender love to the little one.

The maiden is just as sweet. How often in her innocence, unconsciously treading forbidden ground, and plucking of the tree of knowledge in ignorance until the fruit has been tasted, she stands with shy, wondering eyes, as glimpses of the untried begins to unroll before her, and we regard her with loving pity

as we remember the thorny way her feet must tread before the quicksands of inexperience are passed.

Next, the matron standing at the crossing between the past and the future. Mature in her beauty, her intellect, and affections, at once the counsellor and companion, the loving mother and guide, the tender wife and friend, the day-star to whom all eyes turn with love, hope and reverence. Father, husband, brother, son, she is everything to all these. With her foot poised to go forward, yet her eyes are turned lovingly backwards, the past not so far away but that the sensibilities are as keen, the affections as warm as ever. Who would ask for a greater, higher, or nobler right than to be such a woman.

But when all this active life is passed, and others have taken her place in the busy scenes of the world, when her gentle hands may lie at rest, the white hair folded smoothly above the lined brow, and the mild eyes dim to surroundings, turn inward to the past as to a far-off gorgeous picture of which she loves to think and speak at times, but her face is ever turned heavenward, and her nature has become so purified with its near commune with angels, that she loses sight of the evils in the world, and discerns only the good.

Something of this like must have been Aunt Rebecca Adams, for her's was the gentlest nature that ever was molded into woman. Dear old lady! beautiful old age! Heaven spare thee many years yet.

There before her fire, in her cheery kitchen her thoughts went backward, through her long useful life, to her girlhood. She thought of her one pet sister many years younger than herself, who went to a distant city with her husband, where they lived in happy content until death broke up the household; then she thought of their orphan child left to earn her bread with strangers, and wondered why she did not visit her old aunt.

“Dear child, I wish I could see her, I wonder if she resembles her mother.”

This pleasant reverie was at length interrupted by the opening door—that led to the milk-room, and so into the shed—and the entrance of a tall, masculine woman, her head and shoulders wrapped in a woollen shawl. She was followed by a man somewhat above six feet in height, lank and angular in form, with a long, lean, and certainly not handsome face, still not an ill-looking one. He wore no beard, and the sloping chin, the long upper lip, the immense mouth with depressed corners, gave him an expression of sullen obstinacy which, however, his pleasant blue eye belied; and you would not be far wrong, if you made up your mind that though extremely piggish he could be, yet Jacob Wetherbee had a kindly heart, and would do many a good and generous act in his awkward, blundering way. He had thick, wiry hair that stood out in all

directions beneath his large fur cap, and looked as if each individual lock had been grabbed and cut at independent lengths. He walked with a lazy, dragging step to the hearth, and took off his wet coat and hung it on a nail by the chimney, then removing the thick cowhide boots, sat with his long limbs stretched to the fire.

"Pretty hard storm, mother," he said, "I'm plaguy glad the young cattle are in from the hill pasture, and all the creeters are under cover."

"So am I, Jacob," replied the old lady, who had resumed her knitting, "and I hope there is no human being obliged to be out in the storm, for as you say, it is very severe."

Here the younger woman, who had been moving back and forth from pantry to table, making ready the supper, approached the hearth. The cat, though not appearing to be in the way, received a kick that sent him half-way across the kitchen, and Jacob was ordered to "get out of the way, and not take up the whole fireplace."

The man drew up his loose limbs, and shrunk together in an ungainly heap in his chair, while an expression—not of fear certainly—but something akin to it, and sullen resentment settled on his face. The old lady looked at her daughter rebukingly, though she said not a word.

You would not take them for mother and daughter ; there was not the slightest resemblance between them. Mrs. Wetherbee was a tall, large woman, and remarkably well formed, with large feet, large hands that had grown hard and sinewy in her working life, for she was a worker and did not spare herself. She was a handsome woman, too, when her countenance was not disfigured by temper. A pale, thin face was redeemed by large eyes of intense blackness ; she had a broad, well-shaped brow, a fine mass of black hair, always trimly kept, a high roman nose, a small, thin mouth, which could utter the most biting taunts, and woe to the luckless being who fell under her displeasure. There was nothing harsh and cruel enough for her to say to, or about them, and yet she often complained that she was universally shunned, and was highly indignant if a word of censure was ever uttered against herself. Enough of her at present. You will form your own estimate of Mistress Lucinda Wetherbee, before we leave her. Something had gone wrong on this stormy night, and her unhappy temper was in a ferment, and only wanted the smallest cause to make it bubble over. Not a word, however, was spoken, and Mrs. Wetherbee, with a fling and a slam, soon had the supper on the table, and graciously informed her mother and husband that the “ victuals would all git cold if they didn’t come to the table, and not keep it waiting all night ! ” and took her own seat without delay.

The family was barely seated at the abundantly spread board, when a loud hallo, heard above the whirling storm arrested their attention.

“Hallo there! bring out a light!”

Jacob started for a lantern, but in his hurry he tipped his tea upon the cloth, threw over his chair, and trod on the cat; all three mishaps went unreprieved, however, for his wife was peering through the window, “to see,” she said, “if she could make out who the voice belonged to.” It was too dark to see beyond the light from the windows, but by this time the person had reached the door, and was using his knuckles in proportion to his strength.

“Well, you needn’t knock the door down,” snapped the amiable Mrs. Wetherbee, as she jerked the door open. She saw a stranger, and waited for him to speak, instead of asking him in.

“I have a young lady out here in my wagon; she came up in the stage this afternoon, and wants to see Mrs. Adams.”

By this time Jacob had appeared with the lantern, and Aunt Rebecca hastened to say —

“Bring her in! bring her in for mercy sake, out of this pelting rain!”

By the dim light, the dripping figure was lifted out of the wagon and placed within the cottage entry, and Mrs. Adams led her in to the light and warmth.

"Dear Aunt Rebecca! have you no word of welcome for poor little Gerty?"

"My dear child! why, my dear child!" cried the old lady, embracing her warmly, while tears of joy started to her eyes; "how glad I am to see you; welcome! indeed, no one could be more welcome than my beloved sister's child! Now let us have off these dripping wrappers," but indeed the gentle old hands were busy, and in a minute more poor tired Gertrude was seated in her aunt's own chair, comparatively dry and comfortable. Mrs. Wetherbee also kindly welcomed her cousin, though the dark spirit was not yet exorcised.

The farmer who had brought Gertrude from the village, would not stop, for he had yet several miles to ride before reaching home; but as the road was badly washed in front of the house, Jacob stopped to hold the light, and with his usual carelessness left the outside door open. It seemed as though the wind had been watching for this advantage, and now rushed in, and driving such a crowd of watery demons, that the inner door could not withstand the force, but flew open with a bang, and instantly the windy monster had possession. And such capers! the tidy hearth was covered with cinders and burning brands, the white pine floor with feathery ashes, and every rag of cloth caught and whirled as a flag of triumph. Its power was momentary. Lucinda, with an expression almost as fierce as

the elements, slammed both doors with a force that shook the solid house ; then turned to the hearth, and commenced to sweep, while she shot at her cousin,—

“What could have possessed you, Gertrude, to set out in a storm like this ; it looks as if you had been turned out.”

“Lucinda! how can you!” said the mother reproachfully, and her loving eyes turned to the haggard face leaning back in the easy chair. “You are sick, dear, aren’t you? but never mind, up here in the clear mountain air, we will soon have you well again.”

The tone, more than the words, touched the right chord in the sad heart, and tears, the first she had shed since before that dreadful morning, gushed from her eyes. By and by, when calmer, she said in a low, hopeless tone, glancing at the door through which her cousin had disappeared,—

“Dearest Aunt, I am sick, miserable, and heart-broken ; I shall never be any better ; I have come to you to die. You will not send me away when I come to tell you my shame, will you?”

She waited for an answer, her head resting in her hand, and the tears dropping slowly from the drooping eyes. A touch soft as a benediction rested on her bowed head, and the solemn, soothing words brought relief in their sound.

“Child of my dead sister, it matters not how or

whose the wrong done, nor how the world has dealt with you, while Aunt Rebecca has a shelter, it shall be yours."

There was no time for further words, for Jacob came in, and Lucinda returned from the pantry, the neglected supper was again placed upon the table, and even Gertrude, faint from her long journey, found it relishable. After supper a fire was kindled in the spare bedroom, and by and by, Gertrude, weary enough, sank to sleep with a motherly kiss on her heavy lids, to dream of happiness forever lost to her here.

The following morning dawned clear and fair, the earth showed the ravages, but air and sky looked as innocent as though they had had no part in the carnival of fury held the night before. Gertrude, refreshed physically with her rest and slumber, was seated in a low rocker before a cheerful fire in the little sunny room set apart for her use; and in a low, broken voice, related to the sympathizing listener, the story of her weakness.

"Now I have told you all, my only friend," she concluded, "I find little comfort in the fact that I was not intentionally criminal, for I know I am punished justly for consenting to a secret marriage. I know, too, I shall not live long, and may I not hope my early death will expiate my sin."

"My dear unhappy child," said the old lady, regard-

ing her with loving compassion, but without a shade of reproof, is there no way, have you no power to compel this young man to do you justice? He should be made to do this for your child's sake, if not your own." Gertrude shook her head.

"You forget, dear Aunt, he is across the ocean, and could not be summoned in season even if he would come, but if he could so heartlessly abandon me, he would not come at my pitiful bidding; he knows he is safe from me or justice."

"But why not appeal to his father? he is a good man and just, let him force his son to right you, or remain a wanderer."

"Ah!" replied the unhappy girl, "I should only make known my shame, to be spurned. Do you think that proud man would permit his only son to marry one like me on compulsion? O, I was blind, mad to think Percy Vernon could mean true marriage; but I loved him so! and believed him!" Dry, tearless sobs shook the frail form, bowed in her shame, and tears of sympathy fell from the benevolent eyes regarding her. After a silence, in which Gertrude again became composed, Mrs. Adams resumed.

"Are you sure there is no hope of his coming back to you? you have not actually heard of his marriage with this lady, and he has never written to you that your marriage was a sham, although you have received letters from him up to the present time."

Gertrude drew a letter from her bosom, and silently passed it to her aunt, who took it without comment and read it. It was a letter from Percy, she believed, received the morning after she left his father's house, and was simply a confirmation of all her fears. It contained but a few lines, and thus they read:

"Gertrude: You must soon learn the truth, and it is better you hear it first from me. Blame me, curse me if you will, I cannot expect else from you. I believed I loved you, and thought to possess you the greatest delight. I knew I could not raise you to my rank by a true marriage, and I knew you would never consent to be mine otherwise, therefore I resorted to a false marriage. In my blindness I did not think of the crime, nor of the wretchedness it would cause us both, and it was not until in this far-off land I met with one every way my equal, that I knew the meaning of the word Love, or that the passion I cherished for you was as fleeting as it was fierce. I cannot ask you to forgive me, but I must urge you to be silent in regard to our past. Do this, and you shall never want a friend. All that money can procure shall be yours. Choose your place of residence wherever you desire, and a sum of money shall be placed in the nearest bank for your use. You will find enough ready to marry you, and in giving your hand to one who truly loves you, you will soon forget one so unworthy as I am. On the contrary, if

you choose to publish your wrongs, and bring trouble to me, you will receive, at the most, only a certain amount of money, and lasting contempt in return, not only from me and my family, but the world will scorn you for your folly. Think well before you act.

P. V."

Mrs. Adams read this heartless letter to the end, then dropping her hands into her lap, turned her eyes upon her neice; an expression of mingled rage, scorn and grief, flitting over the usually serene old face. At last,—

"Oh, Gerty! Gerty! my poor, poor child! how could you ever have loved him? He so young and yet so unprincipled. How well he knows there is no redress for you, that you can with honor accept?" Gertrude looked at her Aunt, inquiringly.

"You will not accept the money he offers you as the price of your peace?"

"No, oh no, I cannot! Deserted as I am, destitute as I may yet be, I can never receive a penny from him. Dear Aunt, I have enough to defray my present expenses, and if I live I can earn more; but I shall not live, I know I shall not. God in his infinite mercy will pity and take me home." She leaned back and closed her eyes, and the tears started anew, crushing through the dark fringe of the drooping lids like drops of summer rain.

Aunt Rebecca soothed the stricken girl, smoothing back the shining hair, and kissing her tenderly.

"My dear Gertrude, you have my dead Mary's face. I believe you have her pure heart; this is a great misfortune, but we will leave it in the hands of Him who permits such things to be. Have no fear for the future, you shall be to me as a daughter, and share my home always. I would not write to the young gentleman again; let him keep his money for those who can be bought and sold. One thing more, darling, do you intend to bear his name?"

"No indeed! no, I have no legal right to the name, and I will not assume it."

Gertrude had grown calm beneath the loving caress and assuring words of her kind relative, and Mrs. Adams seeing this, thought it best to leave her alone a little while.

"You are right; I only wish to know your own feelings concerning these things, that there may be no jar in our future intercourse. Now rest, my lamb, while I go and find a nice luncheon for you."

Aunt Rebecca went to the kitchen where she found her amiable daughter hurrying to and fro, and slamming about her work, her usual style when — as Jacob said — she was riled. Her little two year old girl tottling about the kitchen, instinctively retreated behind the chairs, whenever her mother came near, and the cat

had curled himself up to the smallest possible space in the corner, and eyed his mistress with yellow distrust, as with broom and mop, she broomed and mopped the floor, already of immaculate whiteness. Jacob had not put in an appearance since morning. He well knew the wisest thing for him to do, when Lucinda was in one of her squally moods, and she was in them often — was to take his long limbs out of the way of her broom, and his ears out of the reach of her tongue.

When Mrs. Adams entered, her daughter gave her one wrathful glance, and then went on with her work, making the windows and the dishes in the corner cupboard fairly jingle with her heavy footsteps. Finally, as her mother moved quietly about, taking no notice of her humor, she jerked out,—

“~~How~~ long is Miss Gertrude a going to stop here ; and why did n’t her husband come with her, if she has got any.”

“Lucinda,” said her mother, mildly, “I wish you would not speak so loud, the poor girl has sorrow enough without our adding to it. You know she has no husband, though she thought she had, poor child !”

“Thought she had ! poor child, indeed ! I don’t believe a word of it !”

“For shame, my daughter ! to be so uncharitable ; I tell you it is true ! she has been most cruelly wronged and deserted.”

“ Well then, why didn’t she stay where she came from, and not come here with her fine lady airs, bringing disgrace and shame to us ? ” and the mop went into the pail with a splash that spilled more water than she mopped up in twice trying.

“ Who should she go to but her own mother’s sister ? she did right to come to me, and I thank all good directing influences that prompted her to come, and she shall remain as long as it is her pleasure or need.” There was a quiet decision in the mild tones, the nearest to sternness she scarce ever came, and her daughter knew it would be useless to gainsay her, but her own ill-nature was thoroughly aroused, and she would have her say.

“ I suppose so ; better make a lying-in-hospital of the house, or a house of reformation ! ” The only reply was a sad, reproving look, but it had not the least effect, she stormed on.

“ One thing is certain, the hussy will get no waiting upon by me ; I have all I can do to go through the slavery of the farm work, without having such as she come to make still more ! ”

“ Daughter ! ” and the old lady’s foot came down to command attention. “ I will have no more of this. I do not ask you to wait on my sister’s child, but I do command you to treat her kindly, and by neither word nor deed add to the unhappiness that is killing her ; if

you do, you shall leave my house, daughter though you are !”

Mrs. Wetherbee was cowed ; though she was too thoroughly ill-tempered to quite cease grumbling. She knew her mother was in earnest, and it would be as well to be civil to her cousin. Jacob was well-to-do, but Lucinda did not care to leave the abundance of Cedar Farm for even his more modern home, so thereafter she was as kind to her gentle relative as it was in her nature to be to any one — many days in succession.

The chill months of winter came and went ; the occupants of Cedar Farm soon settled back into the quiet jog-trot of every day. The coming of Gertrude was like a pebble thrown into the bosom of a summer lake, for a moment it rippled the surface, then the calm succeeded, still and smooth as ever. The poor girl seldom left her retreat, the pleasant south bedroom. There she sat all day long, her eyes closed, or looking with far-off, unseeing gaze, upon the snow-clad fields. She rarely spoke unless addressed, and then her voice was so low, so sadly sweet, it would have touched the coldest heart to have heard her. Daily she grew thinner and paler, except the vivid hectic that burned on either cheek, and the little hands had scarcely strength to lift the large Bible that lay beside her constantly. She never spoke of her destroyer, even to her Aunt, and her cousin did not know his name.

Every way within his power Jacob Wetherbee tried to show his sympathy for her, and was amply repaid by the faintest smile, or low "Thank you, good Jacob." She was so patient, so uncomplaining, that none could see her without pity, and none could know her without love.

And so spring came, bringing genial airs that kissed away the snow, and ardent sunshine that wooed the tender grass and earliest blossoms to the light. With the springing crocus, and shy wood violet, came a tiny wail at Cedar Farm Cottage, and as Gertrude held the baby girl to her breast, and felt the soft little lips seeking nourishment, a new feeling filled her bruised heart; the holy self-abnegating love of motherhood sprang into being as it were, in an instant, and she almost wished to live, — I said sprang into being, I should have said, came to the surface, for motherhood is a wide, deep strata, underlying all womanly natures. Yes, after the coming of her child, I think Gertrude would have been willing to live; but the frail mother grew daily weaker while the little one grew in health and baby charms.

"O my darling," she would often murmur, "if I could but take you with me, must I leave you to a fate, sad perhaps as mine."

"Gerty, my child, have faith, trust in Him who doeth all things well. You have suffered, and you sink beneath the burden in the morning of life, and He to

whom you call relieves you before you reach the heat and turmoil of the day. You leave this fresh young spirit, perhaps to take up your burden, perhaps to win the father to repentance, we cannot tell; have faith, my child, have faith in His promises."


"I will, I do," answered the failing one. "Best of friends, my more than mother, I leave my little Ethel with you; watch over her while you are spared; I have only one wish, do not educate her above her station. She has the promise of great beauty, train her that it may not be as fatal to her as mine has been to me."



CHAPTER VI.

FOUND.

"With thine my soul hath ceased its strife,
Thy part is filled;—thy work is done;
My falsehood buried in my life,
And known to none.
Yet still will golden memories frame
Thy broken image in my heart."—OWEN MEREDITH.

HE June roses, white as the waxen cheeks, were scattered on the pillow, and rested on the still bosom of the broken-hearted. The same month, a year later, that witnessed her midnight nuptials bore on its breeze the last faint sigh of the dying girl.

The mourners were few, but the village church was crowded during the solemn service with wondering spectators, who came from far and near to look upon the beautiful young woman, who had come from—no one knew where—to Aunt Rebecca's to die.

Concerning her nothing was known, and nothing could be learned, except that she had left a little girl babe, for the coffin plate only bore—"Gertrude, aged 18 years."

During the service, a stranger was observed to approach the church, and without entering, leaned by the

outer door as though merely attracted by curiosity. He was tall, graceful, and quite dark in complexion. He wore a long cloak thrown around him — summer though it was — and the hand that held his hat was small, while a single diamond of great brilliancy sparkled upon it. All these details were noted and canvassed afterwards in connection with little Ethel.

The appealing prayer closed, there was a stir, and the stranger turned to go, when a remark by a loiterer near arrested his steps.

“Poor dear, she is very young to die, and so pretty too, I wonder who she was?”

“I am sure I do not know. Aunt Rebecca says she died of a broken heart, and we all know what that means, and you noticed she had no other name than ‘Gertrude.’”

Philip Casā listened stonily; there was no longer a doubt, he had hunted her to her death, his only reward to stand by her grave. He stood, unminding further talk, until the coffin was borne by him to the churchyard, then suppressing a groan, he followed to rest his eyes once more upon the face so dear, so dear to him. Looking neither to right nor left, he passed through the group around the open grave, and they instinctively moved aside to let him approach. Yes, it was Gertrude, she he had murdered, lying so still, so peaceful, she might have been asleep for any semblance of

death upon her sweet face. Smothering all outward sign, he drew his hat low over his brow, and turned away.

Never more to know peace, dreaming or waking. Never more to love the face of woman, or find content in her presence. Never more to be free — while life should last — of the haunting agony of his crime and his loss.

Philip Casā returned to the city a changed and broken man. He soon wedded Alice Vernon — who was devotedly attached to him — and after a few years of unbounded extravagance and dissipation, his life closed, leaving his boy — son by his English wife — a penniless dependent upon the bounty of Alice, who having no child of her own, lavished all the mother-love she knew, upon the affectionate and spirited lad.

Baby Ethel grew in health and sprightliness daily, and the little creature, left helpless in Aunt Rebecca's care, became very precious to the dear old lady. Much to the dissatisfaction of Mrs. Lucinda, her mother expressed a determination to adopt the pretty waif, and endow her with a portion sufficient to ensure her future against want, for the good lady knew the disposition of her daughter too well to hope anything from her, should her own summons come before Ethel reached woman's estate. Unwilling to provoke a scene, or rouse the stormy atmosphere in the household, Mrs.

Adams said no more, after the first intimation, remarking "there was time enough," and so she thought. She was well as ever in her life, and naturally supposed she had many years yet to live, and earnestly prayed she might be spared for baby Ethel's sake. She dreaded what might be the fate of the beautiful, high-spirited, impulsive woman, Ethel promised to make, even in her babyhood. The only resemblance she bore her ill-fated mother was the shy, soft eyes of changing gray. The lashes were long and curled upward like Gertrude's, but black, and the straight, delicately fine features and dark, creamy skin, belonged to Percy Vernon.

At six years of age she was as wild, as loving and loveable little elf, as ever twined itself around the human heart. She had a wilful, imperious temper, this same little damsel, but she had been so trained with strict, yet gentle hand, and so received the simple yet sweet and holy instructions, that even at this early age, she was obedient to the commands of those elder, but especially to the wishes, known or expressed, of her beloved friend, whom she loved with all the strength of her child's heart. Almost from the cradle, her tiny hand—clinked in defiance, would relax, and the flash of temper dissolved in tears, at a word or a glance of gentle reproof from grandmama, as she was taught to call Mrs. Adams.

Neither the helpless situation of the child, nor the re-

spectful obedience she was taught to pay Mrs. Wetherbee, could win from that ungracious person an affectionate or even kindly regard. She considered the little creature an interloper, and every caress offered by Grandmama, and every dollar spent for the child as so much taken from her own children; but this was not the only source of annoyance; strangers observing a group of children at play, were sure to draw the shy-eyed little thing peering through a mass of black curls from the rest to question and caress, while the others more forward, and much prettier, with pink cheeks and bright, uplooking eyes, seldom received much notice.

Mrs. Adams observed all these things with much regret, and redoubled her efforts to make her grandchildren and Ethel more loving and unselfish towards each other; but her daughter's fretful complainings, and ungenerous allusions, made the task a difficult one. Ethel, however, in whom the good balanced the evil, was plastic as warm wax beneath the guiding hand of her judicious friend, and was fast laying the foundation of a noble character, to be matured as years rolled on, and thus in a fair way to fulfil the hopes of her dying mother. But it was not to be. The child whose coming was heralded by tears, and who was received with regret, was not destined to grow to maturity without suffering from the wrong that killed her mother, and exiled her father many, many years.

Without a moment's warning, the summons came, but the white-souled Christian had long waited trustfully her Father's call. She was sitting in her easy chair, feeling in her usual health, when she was stricken speechless and nearly senseless by paralysis. A gleam of reason still remained in the fast glazing eyes, which were bent upon the little Ethel clinging to her gown. The family had hastily gathered about her, and Jacob Wetherbee understood the appealing look. Taking the poor helpless hand, he said :

"Do not fear, mother, I will be the best father I can to the child."

She understood him, and turned her eyes to her daughter, who in her fright and grief, forgot for the present her antipathy to the child, and sobbed — "I will take good care of Ethel, indeed I will, mother."

The anxious expression faded, and with a last effort of strength the nearly helpless hand was laid in benediction on the head that lay in her lap, then the eyes closed, and she was so still the breathless watchers thought the spirit departed ; but when they would have removed Ethel from the loving hand, her eyes opened widely, and a sweet intelligent smile illumined the aged face, and greeted every one present with a farewell blessing, and then a startled rapturous gaze, as though the lingering soul was allowed a glimpse of the glory awaiting to win it from all regret at leaving earth duties unfinished.

None felt this great loss as did little Ethel. Before the burial no one paid any attention to her. Mrs. Wetherbee, busy and bustling as ever with preparations for an ostentatious funereal supper, and really softened by her sorrow, neither hindered the child from going where she pleased, nor concerned for her appearance; so she sat all day long by the door that hid the shrouded form, slipping in whenever the door was opened to admit visitors, begging to be allowed to remain, but again and again coaxed away by pitiful, but mistaken ones, who could not understand the fearless love that longed to stay by the cold form that filled the other little ones with horror.

Poor little Ethel, her tangled hair hung in elf-locks, and her eyes were red and swollen with constant, soundless crying; her dress untidy and uncared for, rendered her an object of pity, even before her faithful friend was laid in the grave. At the funeral, the little daughters of Mrs. Wetherbee were dressed in deep mourning, while Ethel, the truest mourner present, appeared in a white cambric frock—the only one deemed suitable—found by one of the neighbors, who taking compassion on the forlorn child, washed and dressed her, and smoothed her tangled hair. She was not taken to the burying-ground, and when the coffin was carried away, and she was told she could not go, she turned away without a word of complaint, and

watched the procession through her tears as it wound slowly up the sandy road. When it was out of sight, she so far overcame her shyness as to ask Mrs. Atkins, who remained :

“Where will they put my grandmama?”

“Up in the cemetery, dear; they will put her in a grave,” replied the woman.

“In the ground? and shall I never see her again?” how the grieved lip quivered as the tear-wet face was raised pleadingly.

“No, dear, you will never see her again, in this world.”

There was no new outburst of grief, but the little one turned away from the kind hand that would have detained her, and hiding her face in her apron, refused all comforting. She was soon after missed, and could not be found, until late at night, Mr. Atkins came bringing her in his arms. “She had been found by his wife,” he said, “on her way from Cedar Farm cottage, lying asleep on the new made grave, her white dress soiled, and her long curls wet with night dew.”

It seemed she had walked to the village, and reached the cemetery in season to see the coffin lowered, and the grave filled. She hid behind some shrubbery until the mourners had left, and the sexton, with his assistant, had gone also, then she had thrown herself upon

the grave, and wept until she dropped asleep. This she told Mrs. Atkins, who kissed her pityingly, and whose motherly instincts were all aroused as she thought of the unloved future for this desolate little one, her tears fell on the tangled hair, and she was so kind that Ethel begged to stay with her, but when told she must go home, she went without a word of remonstrance, accompanied by Mr. Atkins, who, though a poor man, — and very likely always would be, for he was a tippler — had a very tender heart, and said, as he lifted the frail child in his arms :

“I wish we weren’t so poor, Lizzie, I would keep the little thing myself, I am afraid she will lead a tough life with Mrs. Lucinda.”

“I am afraid so, John, but she will always have enough to eat, and decent clothes to wear ; Lucinda will not dare to do otherwise with her abundance, and the well-known wishes of her mother.” Lizzie Atkins stooped again to kiss the child, whose large eyes were wistfully regarding their kindly faces.

“May I come again and see you ?” she asked, reaching out her little hands, and clasping them about the neck of her friend, and of her own accord pressing a kiss on the lips that spoke so kindly to her.

“Yes indeed, dear, whenever Lucinda will let you,” and putting her apron to her eyes, Mrs. Atkins walked into the house, while her husband, hugging the little

mourner to his breast, went out through the darkness, to carry her home.

When the will came to be read, it was found to have been made several years previous to the birth of Ethel, and had not been altered, nor anything added since, consequently she was left to the tender mercies of her ungenerous relative, with no provision whatever made for her future. In searching among her mother's effects, Lucinda came across a letter addressed to herself, folded in the same wrapper with a carved rosewood box. The box was tied with a ribbon, on which the key was hung, and which also confined a paper addressed to Ethel Lester. Lucinda opened the letter with some curiosity. It contained instructions regarding the box, should Mrs. Adams be called away before Ethel reached womanhood. The box was never to be opened on any consideration, except by Ethel, to whom it was to be delivered on her eighteenth birth day. "Be faithful, my daughter," concluded the letter, "and keep Ethel with you, treat her kindly, as you would wish another to treat your little ones, were they left motherless."

Mrs. Wetherbee turned the casket over and over in her hand. With a curiosity common to ordinary minds, she longed to penetrate the secret of her cousin's misfortune, and that secret—she felt sure—she now held in her hands; the key was in the lock, and

nothing but the solemn injunction of her mother's letter withheld her. She put it away at last, and went on with her examination.

She found all of Gertrude's exquisite wardrobe laid carefully away, except such as had been used by her mother for Ethel, and she knew it had been the intention of Mrs. Adams to use it all for the child.

"She'll wear no more muslin and cambric frocks and silk aprons, while my children wear calico and gingham. If she stops with me, she'll wear no better than they." Here Jacob put his long neck through the door; she called him to come in, and showed him the letter and box, at the same time asking, "what they had better do with Ethel."

"Do? do just as the letter directs you; we must keep the girl until she can take care of herself," said Jacob, decidedly.

"I intend to do as the letter directs me in regard to the box," replied his wife, "but I don't see why we must have a little come-by-chance thrust upon us, if we don't want her; the letter does not say, I must, but only requests me to, if I chose to do so."

"Why Lucinda!" remonstrated Jacob, earnestly, "it was your mother's dying request. She left us everything, only requiring us to give this girl a home, until she is old enough to earn her own living."

"And enough, too," retorted his wife; "here we

are to keep her, and send her to school, clothe and feed her, take care of her if she is sick; and just as she is good for something, have her running away, without so much as thanking us, and perhaps bringing shame upon us, same as her mother did!"

"Well, what are we to do? It is well known in the village that mother intended to settle a portion on Ethel, large enough to educate her, and keep her above want her lifetime. If we send her to the poor-house, and refuse to do anything for her, what will folks say? Then, again, she may be claimed, sometime, by one who will be glad to reward us for our care of her." Jacob threw in this last remark, hoping to influence his wife, through her cupidity—for he really wished to fulfil his promise to his mother-in-law, and keep the child."

"Pooh! no danger of ever hearing from those fine folks. I don't believe the stranger, who appeared at Gertrude's funeral, was anything to her. He did not ask a single question, that I could even learn, and he certainly knew nothing about the baby. I wish I knew what this box contains;" she took it up thoughtfully again, and turned it over, "I have a good mind to open it."

"Lucinda," again remonstrated her husband, "I would not do it; depend on what I say, no good will ever come on't, going contrary to the will of the dead!"

“Jacob, you’re a fool!” was the gentle reply — and the husband, well knowing he had said all that it was safe to say in opposition to his wife — subsided. “What possible harm can it do? beside, if we are to keep the young one, it is no more than right we should know all that we can know about her.”

“Well, if you think best; and I should kinder like to know what the old lady kept so still-like, and find out if we can, who the child’s father is.” Curiosity was fast getting the better of honorable scruples in the mind of Mr. Wetherbee, who, without being a wicked man, by any means, was somewhat dull on nice points, like the one involved, and scarcely comprehended the baseness of the act.

The key was applied, the lid raised, and, as was expected, the box contained letters, but these — to her anger and dismay — were written in French; and it might as well have been Greek, for all the information the two peering over them could obtain. Nothing but the date and initials were plain to them; they could not even make out the postmark.

If she had examined the letters separately, she would have learned all she was so anxious to know. All of the later ones were in English, and in the last one the marriage certificate was concealed; but the vandals did not see these. In the bottom of the casket something heavy was wrapped in a silken cover. Lucinda

unrolled it. A gold chain of most exquisite workmanship, with initials in German text wrought on the clasp, and pending from it a blood-red cross and plain gold ring hung glittering. Exclamations of wonder broke from both, as they examined the jewels.

"It must be worth a sight of money," muttered Jacob.

"Yes," slowly responded his wife, holding it so the sun would touch the rubies. "Yes, and I guess we'll keep the young one for the present; this may lead to the finding of her father. Perhaps we shan't lose anything in the end." So saying, she returned the papers to the casket, together with the ring and cross, closing and locking it, and attaching the key and paper as before. Husband and wife soon after left the room.

In a few moments, a little figure crept from beneath the bedvalance—and stood with eyes open wonderwide, and long tangled black hair hanging over her face—in the middle of the room. Poor little Ethel; she could not understand why she was never allowed in the familiar room; why, whenever she attempted to enter, she was called sharply to come back, and why, whenever she was found in there she was sent out with sharp words and blows. All this did not prevent the grieving child from stealing in as often as she found an opportunity; and on this occasion she had been harshly chidden for some childish act—whatever it might have

been, it was criminal in Lucinda's sight — and with her little heart filled with a sense of being wronged, had gone slyly in to the forbidden chamber, and the more effectually to hide herself, crept under the bed. It was the bed in which she was born, and where her mother died, and also where Ethel had slept, until her dear old friend died ; but now her bed was made in one end of the long, low-roofed attic of the house, unfinished and dark, where no one slept, except John, the farm hand. The afternoon of which I tell you, the little thing lay sobbing softly, in fear of being heard, and watching the shadows dancing on the home-made carpet, as the blossoming lilac-trees swayed in the golden sunlight. By and by the sobs grew less, until only a soft sigh trembled from the grieved lips, and mother sleep shut out the fantastic gambols of the shadows, and the sense of wrong, and wrapped the child in forgetfulness.

It was an hour later, when Jacob Wetherbee speaking with his wife — awoke her ; but it was fear and not cunning that kept her silent and still as a mouse, until they went out. She heard all they said, but of course was too young to comprehend the meaning fully. But she did comprehend that she was different from other children, and that her cousin did not want to keep her. How the little one wished she could be sent away somewhere, where people would speak kindly to

her, and not slap her ears until she could scarcely hear — she understood also, from the talk — that she had a father, though they did not seem to know where he lived, and that the beautiful sparkling thing her cousin took from the box, might help to find him. Scarcely more than a baby though she was, she never forgot these things through all the sad years of her childhood that followed. She understood, too, that the box and its contents were to be her own, when she grew to be a woman; how long it seemed until then, — but this fact too, she never forgot.

Bewildered by what she had heard, and wondering what it could all mean, she was startled again by hearing her name called by Mrs. Wetherbee. Frightened, and undecided, the poor child did not know what was best for her to do. She knew if she answered from the forbidden room, she would be harshly punished, and if found there, she would receive a severer punishment for not answering. She glanced at the low window, and with the instinct of self-preservation scrambled out, but a treacherous nail caught her frock, and the material not being very strong, a long straggling rent was the consequence; and the window being higher from the ground than she had expected, she fell in the soft black dirt, soiling her hands and apron sadly. The little girl looked at her torn and soiled dress in dismay, but the loud, angry voice calling her must be

answered—so running around to the door, she met Lucinda face to face.

“Where have you been? you good-for-nothing; did n’t you hear me calling you?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Why did n’t you answer me then?” then her eyes falling on the rent, and marks of fresh dirt, she caught the child by her slender arm, and flung her half way across the kitchen. “Now tell me where you’ve been to, and how you tore that!” pointing to the dress, “or I’ll whip you soundly!”

“I tore it on a nail,” sobbed the terrified child.

“What nail?”

“Under the window of grandmama’s room.”

“Why have n’t you washed your face, and combed your hair, as I told you to?”

“I did, please.”

“You did? don’t you lie to me; your mop of a head has not felt the comb to-day, and your face is dirtier than when I sent you to wash it.”

Ethel did wash her face when told to, but her unlucky fall had dirtied it again, and she could not comb out the thick mass of curling hair,—her grandmama had always done it for her, and her unaccustomed hands had only succeeded in making it look worse than ever.

“Come here!” cried Mrs. Wetherbee, “I’ll soon

fix my little madam," and sending her eldest daughter for a coarse dress belonging to a younger child, she substituted it for Ethel's muslin one, then getting her scissors, she soon denuded the girl's head of the long, dancing curls, and left the crimping hair cropped close.

"There, I have something else to do beside decking a dainty piece like you in fine cloths, and curling your hair for half a day! I guess you can comb that yourself, and mind," she added, sharply, "if you tear this dress, you'll catch it, sure as you're born."

And this was the beginning, only the beginning of Ethel's troubles. The tender form that had bowed but to the touch of love, was soon obliged to stagger under heavy blows, and the quick intelligence that responded freely to loving instruction, grew sullen and fearful at the harsh command and degrading epithet. During the next two years, she went to the village school with her cousins. But little care was taken of her person or dress. The latter consisted of the cast-off garments of Mrs. Wetherbee's children, too large or too small as the case might be; her hair was kept closely cut, so the child could dress it herself—she looked very little like the daintily neat pet she was when Mrs. Adams lived.

The school-children, like children of larger growth, seeing the neglected condition of the little girl, and the rude words and ruder treatment she received from her cousins, did not hesitate to do likewise, so

the motherless one became the abused and ridiculed butt for the mischievous brats, and the scapegoat for all their tricks, and was often unfeelingly punished for ill consequences of which she was blameless. Nothing the child could say in her own justification was heeded, against the evidence of a dozen or more, so she rarely attempted to justify herself, but grew to accept her punishment in sullen silence, and sitting through play hours, watching the joyous children at their romps, when the thoughtless imps would let her alone, but it often happened — when other amusements failed — they would turn to Tom Nobody — as they called Ethel, and find plenty of fun pulling her short hair, throwing dirt in her bosom, pricking her with thorns, and tearing her worn dress.

Ethel by no means bore all this with meekness, but often, instead of shedding tears, her eyes would flash like polished steel, and flying at first one and then another of her tormentors, would lay her little fist about her with so much force — and often using clubs or stones that came in her way — that they would scatter like startled sheep. Of course she was punished, and told she was wicked, and bad, one whom everybody would hate, and who would come to some dreadful end unless she learned to curb that wicked temper; then urged to ask forgiveness of those who had goaded her to such fits of passion.

But in these efforts the teacher was unsuccessful. "I don't want them to forgive me," would be the dogged answer. True to her instinct, the upright truthful child could not ask forgiveness for doing that which she would do again the next hour, perhaps, and feel justified in doing. So she came to be looked upon as an incorrigible outcast by the matrons of the village, with whom it was not safe for their own more favored darlings to associate, and who would grow up a vile headstrong thing, like her mother. Poor Mrs. Wetherbee was commiserated as one who had accepted a difficult task from pure charity, for the truth was not known, and she was applauded and pitied in the same breath.

One noticeable fact in the little girl neither the parents nor teacher could deny. She was—for her age—by far the best scholar in school, in spite of the old mangled books grudgingly bestowed. Her lessons were always perfect, and she was always at the head of her class. No lesson was too difficult for her to master, and could she have had books, she would have soon been at the head of the school. She craved knowledge, and absorbed it as the dry earth absorbs the falling rain. With fixed attention she listened to lessons explained to more favored ones, and in the end understood them more fully than those immediately concerned. Often, when the other children were at

play, Ethel would seize their books, and creeping away to some corner or nook, devour the contents with avidity. Old bits of newspaper picked up by the roadside, were pored over, and books of all kinds, whenever she could lay her hands on them, were eagerly studied, until mastered, so that at eight years of age, she was as far advanced in text books, and much farther in general information, than most children at fourteen.



CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCE!

"He comes, scarce knowing what he seeks;
He breaks the hedge; he enters there;
The color flies into his cheeks;
He trusts to light on something fair.
For all his life the charm did talk
About his path, and hover near
With words of promise in his walk,
And whispered voices at his ear."



WHEN Ethel was nine years old, Mrs. Wetherbee came to the conclusion that she was old enough "to earn her salt," or in other words, old enough to do chores around the house, thus save hiring help more than half the year, for children gathered fast at Cedar Farm, and Mrs. Wetherbee found her cares and work increase beyond her ability to manage them without help. Therefore Ethel was taken from school, and burdens heavy enough to weigh down stronger shoulders than hers, poor child! laid upon her. From early morn till dark, her weary feet went their toiling round, and when released, she would creep away without a light, to her poor little bed under the eaves. How in after years, when she was the light and blessing of home, these

stilly, restful hours, before blessed sleep had kissed her eyelids, came back to her. The pattering rain on the low roof, the twittering house-sparrows, the swaying of the long elm branches touching the house, or the murmurous flow of the river that ran not far from the door ; these sounds, and perhaps some not so sweet made an impression on her memory never to be effaced. Constant hard labor was bad enough to put upon a child so young, but added to this, Lucinda did not scruple to apply the ready and degrading blow, accompanied by taunting epithets, needless as unjust.

Ethel did not dare a show of temper to her cruel task-mistress, for a speedy and shameful punishment was the result. Such treatment, as it always does, roused a fierce, unlovely spirit in the breast of the little girl. She shrank sullen and defiant from observation, and nursed a feeling of hatred towards every member of her cousin's family, and did what she was compelled to do, in moody submission. The sweet and holy lessons instilled into her baby mind by grandma, were fast fading, and spiteful, wicked ones taking their place. I am writing a child's history, and perhaps you are shocked, my friend, at such unnatural details. I am sorry I cannot paint her in fairer colors, make her a prodigy of sweetness in spite of evil influences, precocious in judgment, and in fact gay, bright and loveable, as childhood should be. I might make her all this, did

I draw from fancy instead of memory, but Ethel is a true picture of an orphan's life with all its faults, and all its sufferings, not exaggerated, but rather softened down within belief. One weary year of this drudgery, making four since Mrs. Adams' death, and seeming like centuries to poor little Ethel. But a new era was about to dawn in her desolate existence, and give her darkening soul a ray of hopeful light.

It was a bright, soft June day, and Cedar Farm was beaming with beauty. The sharp click, click, of the mower's scythe, the hum of insects, and the twittering of summer birds, fell on the ear like the varied notes of music. Even the murmuring ripples of the smooth flowing river, along which the highway ran, could be heard this still summer day. The sun was near the meridian, and Mrs. Wetherbee was hurrying to and fro, putting dinner upon the table, her face flaming with heat and hurry, and she scolding and slamming worse than usual, if that was possible. Woe to child, cat or dog, who happened in her way. Ethel was trying with all the strength of her slender hands, to draw from the wide-mouthed oven, a heavy pot of beans — New England's home dish.

"You'll let that fall! I know you will!" shrieked the virago, "but if you do! There, what did I tell you!" as crash came the pot upon the brick hearth, and the hungry men's dinner lay in a heap unfit for food.

She flew at the child, who stood looking at the wreck half stupified with fear, and dealt her a blow on either side of the head with a hand that might have felled a man, and sent her headlong to the floor. Not satisfied with this, she gave her a kick as she was struggling to her feet, which again sent her back upon her face. After the first cry of pain, Ethel did not open her lips, or shed a tear, but again rising to her feet, she turned her eyes gleaming with hate and despair on her persecutor, fled from the house, and Mrs. Wetherbee, a little frightened at her last brutal act, made no attempt to call her back.

Out through the green lane that led to the highway, across that, and down over the high sloping bank, beneath which the silvery river run, darted the maddened child. Following the narrow path in and out among the clustering elders and whispering birches that fringed these green banks, Ethel, with a spring and a bound, cleared the strip of sandy beach, and without pause, threw herself into the stream.

In her headlong flight she did notice a handsome horse, with the bridle thrown over his neck, quietly cropping the grass, while his master, a stripling of sixteen or seventeen, lay at full length on the grassy slope, enjoying the cool shade of the fragrant elders, from the heat of the mid-day sun. As the wretched child flew past him, the youth sprang to his feet, and she had

scarcely touched the bottom, when he had thrown off his outer garments and plunged after her. When the white face of little Ethel rose to the surface a short distance from where she went down, the boy grasped her frock, and bore her to the bank with as much ease as he would a baby. Laying her upon the soft grass, he soon succeeded in restoring animation, for she was scarcely unconscious, so quick had been her rescue. Rising to a sitting posture, she turned her large wondering eyes upon her rescuer, at the same time putting her hands to her head in a dazed sort of way, as though not quite able to recall what had just passed. The youth was curiously regarding her. There was something so sad, so piteous in the pale, pinched face, that he could scarce restrain the tears.

“Poor little girl, was you trying to drown yourself?”

Ethel started to her feet, though she reeled, whether from weakness or the effects of the terrible blows on her head, and would again have thrown herself into the stream, but the young stranger caught her, and drew her down by his side; as he did so, the fastenings of her dress gave way, and he nearly pulled it from her shoulders.

“Let me go, sir!” she cried, her natural shyness of strangers overcome, and all other feelings merged into the one insane desire to escape from her intolerable misery. “Let me go! I will drown myself! I will, I

will!" and she tried again to get away from the detaining hand that held her gently, but so firmly she could not carry out her intentions. Finding her efforts useless, she sat quiet a moment, then asked,—

"Why did you pull me out?"

"Why, I could not let you perish right before my eyes, could I? Tell me, sissy, do you really wish to die?"

"O yes, I do want to die, I do, I do! and I shall, too!" she added, in a sad, determined tone pitiful to hear, "as soon as you let me go."

"Then I shall not let you go; but why, poor little girl, do you wish to die?"

"O, I want to go to my mother, and my dear grand-mama, and because she beats me so."

"Who beats you, poor child!"

"Mrs. Wetherbee, and she is my cousin, and I live with her, and she lives up there," and Ethel jerked her head towards the house.

"Why does she beat you? do you belong to her?"

"No, I don't belong to anybody, and Lucinda beats me because she wants to, I guess, and because I am naughty, and," suddenly clenching her small fist, "I hate her."

At this reply, a smile half dimpled the boy's lip, but the utter misery depicted in the forlorn figure before him, checked it instantly.

"Poor little thing, I am so sorry for you," he said, parting the short tangled and dripping hair with his white fingers; then tipping her chin so as to make her look at him, "have you no friends to protect you? have you no father?"

Ethel shook her head; she could not answer. This unwonted kindness caused her heart to swell, and lips to quiver, and she knew if she uttered a word the tears would start. There was pity and wonder mingled in the expression of the young stranger, as he continued to regard the child. She sat with her shy, soft eyes bent upon the ground, and the long black lashes resting on her thin cheeks; every feature was perfect and delicately carved as a parian image, though the face was haggard with suffering. The shoulders that had been covered with the dress were white as marble, and as finely veined, while the face, neck, hands, and even the small pretty feet, were brown with exposure.

From an impulse he could not resist, the boy leaned over and kissed her. Instead of a flush of pleasure which a child of that age might receive such a caress, the sensitive little creature threw herself forward upon the ground, and burst into a storm of sobs and tears. This was the climax Guy had hoped to prevent, and was more perplexed than ever, not knowing what to say or do to comfort her; so he remained perfectly quiet until the sobbing ceased, and the exhausted child

lay with her eyes closed, and only now and then a fluttering sigh left her parted lips.

"O I wish I was rich," thought the impulsive boy, "or that I had a mother, I would take this poor little girl away with me, and carry her home; at all events I mean to do something for her by and by, if I cannot at present." With these thoughts he drew the frock, now quite dry, over her shoulders, and slipping his arm beneath the slight form, drew her to his side, letting her head lean back upon his shoulder. She opened her eyes, and did not avert them as was usual with her, but fixed them on his with a wistful, earnest look, that gave the heart of the boy a strange thrill, and his determination to do something for her benefit grew stronger. He could not resist the temptation to again kiss the grieved mouth. For a brief instant he was startled, perhaps the same result might follow as before, but no, the childish lips returned the caress, and nestling closer, she said:

"You are good to me, and I love you; I guess you are my father, ain't you?"

This time the youth did laugh outright, while the blood grew deeper in his girlish cheeks.

"No dear, I don't think I am your father, do you?" and the merry, dark eyes flashed down into her questioning ones, but Ethel did not smile, and the shadows began to gather again, so he became grave instantly.

"Why, do you wish I was your father?"

"O yes!" sadly replied the girl, "then you would take me away from here."

"Would you go with me?"

"Yes, indeed I would! for I am sure you would not beat me, nor send me to bed without my supper, and you would let me go to school, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed, you should go to school, and have plenty to eat, and pretty dresses to wear, and no one would ever wish to harm you. But tell me your father's name, and where he has gone?"

"I don't know his name, nobody knows his name, nor where he is, if I did, I would go to him."

"Well, what is your name?"

"Ethel."

"A pretty name, have you no other?" Ethel shook her head.

"Lucinda says I have no right to any other name." A faint inkling of what might be the truth, flashed into the questioner's mind.

"Is Lucinda your aunt?" he again questioned.

"No, she is grandmama's daughter."

"O!" and the merry eyes began to sparkle at this naïve answer. "So your mother is dead, and your father has gone away, and you do not belong to anybody, is that it, Ethel?"

"Yes sir," replied the child simply.

"Well my name is Guy, will you remember?"

"Yes, I will remember, and will you take me with you? I will be such a good girl, and do just as you tell me to."

"Listen to me, dear little Ethel, and I will tell you how I am situated. I live in a great city many miles away from here; my father and mother are both dead; I have no money of my own, but I have a dear, kind step-mother, who gives me everything I ask for. We love each other very dearly, and I think she will let me come for you, and take you home. But if she will not consent, then I can do nothing for you at present; but in four years I shall be of age, then I can do as I please, and I will come for you if I am alive; do you understand me, Ethel?"

"Yes, I understand you, sir, but it will be a long, long time before I can see you again."

"No, it may not be long, for I think my mother will let me come back for you within a week; I only tell you what I will do, providing she is not willing to receive you at once. I have no money except that which she gives me, and if I do nothing to displease her, I can do more for you by and by." The child did not reply, so the boy continued: "Now tell me, dear, will you wait patiently four years, and not try to drown yourself again?"

"Oh yes, I will be very patient and wait, and when

she beats and kicks me, I will rememoer you will come for me sometime, and try not think how my head aches."

This was said with such a sad resignation, that the warm-hearted boy could not prevent the tears springing to his own eyes. Ethel marked them, for a child is quick to read sympathy, and passing her hand caressingly over his face, asked :

" You pity me, don't you, sir ? "

" I do indeed pity you, dear, and I should like to take you right away with me," " and I would, too," he thought, " if I was sure of a welcome for her." And then he fell to thinking and studying the sandy beach at his feet, though his thoughts were far from the pretty spot. The fact was, Guy had his doubts about his elegant young stepmother having much sympathy with his scheme of adopting this forlorn little waif, and as he remembered her natural traits of character, though she had ever been most indulgent to him, and was usually placid and gentle, he knew she was cold, and not inclined to acts of charity, still it was possible she might befriend Ethel for his sake. He would try, at all events, and starting from his contemplation of pebbles, found the soft eyes of the child regarding him earnestly.

" I must leave you, Ethel, and until I come again you will have faith that I will come ? "

"Yes sir, I know you will come."

"I surely will come; and now, Ethel, I want you to call me Guy, and not Sir, will you remember?"

"Yes, Guy."

"That is right. Do you know how old you are?"

"Yes, I was ten last April."

"Why, you are older than I thought you. Well, you will be fourteen in four years. Can you write?"

"Not very well, I have never been taught, but I have tried to learn myself from the books belonging to the other children."

"Does the woman ever send you to school?"

"No."

"Well, never mind, you shall go by and by."

For hours, these two talked together, the warm-hearted, manly youth, and the little outcast "whom nobody owns," never dreaming they were warping the web that fate must weave for them, but whether light or dark the weft may be, the years alone must determine. The sun had long passed the meridian hour, and was fast nearing the west, when Ethel's new-found friend glanced upward, and then at his watch. The shadows had crept up the bank, and the sunlight lay glancing on the murmuring river, and warm, though not unpleasantly so, in their green nook. The handsome horse had followed the shade up the hill, and now stood quietly switching the flies from his glossy sides,

waiting the movements of his master. The young stranger rose to his feet.

"I must go now, Ethel; promise me once more you will be patient and wait for me."

"I will Guy, I will wait for you four years, and I know you will come for me then."

"If I am alive, I will come for you," returned the boy, embracing the child warmly.

"O, I do so hate to have you go," she said, clinging to his neck, as he stooped to kiss her again, while Guy lingering, more unwilling to go than he would have believed it possible, said:

"I must go, dear Ethel, or I shall not reach the village where I am to meet my mother, before dark." The boy led his horse down to the sand, and taking the child's hand, turned to follow the path he came. "You shall go with me to the landing, and then ride to the house." But Ethel shrank back.

"O no! they would see me; why do you go back so far, if you are going to the south village?"

"I thought it would be more pleasant than climbing this steep bank," answered Guy.

"Yes, but if you go down the river-path for half a mile, there is another landing, where you can go into the road easily, and I can go with you, and the folks from the house won't see me."

Following the shimmering line of water as far as the

eye could reach, he saw the strip of white sand, so turning the horse's head in that direction, he asked :

"Will you go with me so far?"

"Yes, if you will let me."

"But won't you be tired?"

"No, not a bit, do let me go."

"Well, come then," and taking the brown little hand in his, and slipping the bridle over his arm, this strangely mated pair walked leisurely down the river-path. He, with all the appliances of wealth and gentle birth, graceful and pleasing without effort. She, in rags of the coarsest kind, bare-headed, barefooted, and but for her delicate, elfish beauty, almost repulsive to look upon. When they reached the landing, Guy prepared to bid his little friend farewell.

"Now Ethel, will you remember all I have told you?"

"Yes, every word! I won't forget?" eagerly cried the child. He kissed her again and again, then unclasping her clingings arms, and holding both hands, said:

"Now go back, and don't cry any more; I will come for you in a week if it is possible; if I do not, I will come for you in four years, and carry you away to school. Good-bye!" and once more kissing the quivering lips, he sprang to his horse, and galloped down the road. Ethel watched, half blinded by the tears that would come, until a turn in the road hid him from



"Well come then," and taking the brown little hand in his, and slipping the bridle over his arm, the strangely mated pair walked down the river path —



her view, then she retraced her steps along the sand to the place where she had flung herself into the river; a book was lying on the grass, she stooped eagerly and picked it up. Turning to the title-page, she read "Longfellow's Poems," and on the blank leaf a name, of which she could only make out "Guy;" it was however his entire name and native city. "I am so sorry," was her first thought, "I am so glad," her second, "for he can get another, and if he don't come back in a week, I shall have it to read." She was soon lost to all sights and sounds, and young as she was, she did not fail to comprehend the sublime, yet simple lines of the grand poet. She found many pencil marks on different pages, and on one in particular, she read:

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime."

Then shutting the book, she sat dreaming, with perfect faith, of all that the beautiful stranger had promised her.

A shrill voice roused her to a sense of the immediate, and she sprang in fear to her feet. The voice came nearer, and "Ethel, Ethel," rang along the river.

"I am here," answered the child, climbing the steep bank like a squirrel. Mrs. Wetherbee was waiting for her at the top, and regarded her curiously, but seeing her appearing as well as ever, she was relieved; nay,

better, for the afternoon had left its impress on the little dark face, and given it a happy expression not very common to it.

“Where have you been, you lazy trollop?” were the first words of greeting. Ethel made no reply, but dodging a blow aimed at her, she darted towards the house. “Here, come back! and march and get the cows home, and mind! don’t be long, or I’ll know the reason!”

My friend, did you ever listen to a scold?—I do not mean a well-bred scold, for there are such, a well-bred, polished scold, who worries and frets in the most unexceptionable language and tone, until you feel full of pins and needles, but a loud-voiced, energetic, uneducated woman, who uses any word that will give force to her theme, or round her periods to her satisfaction. If you never heard one of this kind, you will deem my picture overdrawn; if you have, you will vouch for its truthfulness.

Of this genius was Mrs. Wetherbee. From early morn till late at night, her shrill voice kept time with her heavy steps, as she went from kitchen to dairy, from shed to garret, and so on, back to cellar or pantry, overseeing every corner of her extensive household, sweeping and scrubbing, churning and cooking, day in and day out. There was no rest for herself nor any one within her gates. Her husband and children dreaded her, but did not respect her. Her servants, men and

women, both feared and disliked her ; while her neighbors, even when they ridiculed her peculiarities, shrank in fear from the scathing sharpness of her tongue. Mrs. Wetherbee knew of this aversion, but considered her friends and family in the blame, and herself misunderstood, so she went on scolding, grumbling, keeping a keen eye to money-getting and money-saving, growing more sour and rancorous as she grew older. Her husband was entirely unlike her. He was as easy as his wife was energetic, as good-natured as she was cross, unless his mulish instincts were aroused, then he would sit for hours, sulky and glowering, his hands to his ears, and his eyes on his newspaper—for he was something of a politician in his way—while his wife was railing around him. Sometimes he would retort, and his remarks, if short, were always to the point, and anything but soothing or complimentary to his spouse. Then would follow a disgraceful scene of snarling and recrimination, that all who would, might witness. As a natural consequence, the children had but little respect for their parents, and as they grew in years, they were continually wrangling among themselves, a natural sequence of the training they received. In only one creed did Jacob and Lucinda agree, and that was money-getting, and it was the hope that Ethel would sometime be claimed, that induced them to keep her, and send her to school the winter part of the year. Jacob

Wetherbee was not particularly kind to the child, yet he was never cruel, and had his wife seconded his own wishes, Ethel would have gone to school for several years, been decently dressed, and made to work no harder than his own children; but Lucinda had taken the responsibility entirely from him, and his easy-going nature did not regret it.

On the night of Ethel's golden day, she was suffered to creep away without further chiding to her garret. The place was lighted only by the stars, but the little one needed no other, she knew the way too well. She did not undress, but after repeating the prayers that her grandmama had taught her, knelt by the low window in the gable and folding her arms upon the sill, rested her head upon them. She did not feel sleepy; it seemed to her she should never feel sleepy again; or not until she was at home in the grand, city house that Guy described to her. She felt sure she should love the handsome, stately lady Guy called mother, for he said she was always pleasant, never scolded, nor ever struck a child in her life. Poor little girl, she had not yet learned how merciless those placid natures could be, so she thought one so good must be near akin to angels, and thought, too, how faithful and obedient she would be, and how diligent she would study, when sent to school, and how nice she would keep the pretty frocks Guy promised her, and so there under the low

roof, she reared her cloud castles, as many an older maiden has done, and will do to the end.

By and by, John came up to bed in the larger and more airy part of the great garret. Ethel kept still as a mouse, and very soon a loud snore proclaimed his safe landing on the shore of sleep, and the child knew she had nothing more to fear from his wakefulness; then one after another the sounds ceased, until nothing was heard in the great farmhouse, save the loud tick of the kitchen clock, and Ethel prepared to go for her precious book; for though she did fear Lucinda's prying eyes, let it be hidden ever so carefully, still the rain might fall before morning, then it would be quite spoiled. But how to get out of the house was the question. The heavy outer door creaked loudly in opening, and her cousin's room was near it, and the slightest sound would awaken her. Ethel did not dare to try that way, and the back door was equally difficult. She leaned from the window, it was fearfully high — not for the roof of a house by any means, but for a child to fall; there was no other way however, and she resolved to try it. An old grape-vine nearly covered that end of the house, and crept straggling to the very chimney. Parting the branches, Ethel climbed out, and being light-footed as a cat, reached the ground without accident. She did not wait to listen, but ran swiftly over the path she had so madly rushed in the

morning. She soon found her book safe in the long grass from even the night-dew, and securing it, she noiselessly and quickly regained her bedside, and putting her treasure under her pillow, nestled down to the deep sleep of childhood. Naturally Ethel was a timid child, and afraid of the dark, but from that hour she never felt fear, the darkest night or the loneliest road had no terror for her.

For a week Ethel waited, hopeful and patient; her heart thrilling with her happy secret. She scarcely minded the frequent blow or the harsh epithet, flung at her by her spiteful mistress. She did all her duties as one in a maze, and it was no wonder Mrs. Wetherbee declared the child grew more stupid and heedless every day. It appeared she never made so many blunders; her eyes, whenever it was possible, were fixed on the winding, sandy road, in the direction her Prince had gone. At the sight of every strange carriage or horseman in the distance, the hopeful child would stand, large-eyed, until they passed, and then with a sigh remember her neglected drudgery. But when a week had doled out its seven days, the time limited by Guy for his return, all expectation died out in her heart, and she knew he had not succeeded with his mother. She did not doubt him for an instant, but believed just as surely he would come for her in four years, as she believed in her own existence.

But oh, it seemed so long to wait, so long to drudge from morning till night, to be beaten and snarled at. No, she was sure she should never live to see him again; and she wondered if he would feel sorry if he came and asked for her, and they told him she was dead. For many nights after the week had passed, Ethel would cry herself to sleep, but the heart of childhood is very elastic, and not given to despondency by nature, so she made up her mind to do just as her Prince had requested her to do, be patient and cheerful until he came again.

She was determined to try more earnestly than ever to obey the half uttered instructions given her, and be more careful in performing the labor assigned her. But all her good resolutions, and carried out too, as well as a faulty, untrained child could carry them out, were insufficient to render her life more bearable, for, as we have said, Mrs. Wetherbee scolded with cause and without, so let the girl do as well as she could, there was always something reprehensible in her conduct, scanned with her mistress' eyes. I do not propose to follow Ethel through the next four years, for until that period she remained the burdened servant of her unscrupulous relative.



CHAPTER VIII.

ETHEL'S RESOLVE.

"We see but half the causes of our deeds,
Seeking them wholly in the outer life,
And heedless of the encircling spirit-world,
Which though unseen, is felt, and sows in us
All germs of pure and world-wide purposes.—LOWELL



THE April that ushered in Ethel's fourteenth birthday, came and passed, and the warm, golden June was fast approaching. Ethel had grown to a tall, well-formed girl, slender and delicately made, with pretty hands, though hard and brown, and shapely feet, though she went with them bare half the year at least. She had a natural grace and prettiness of manner, rarely seen except in children born in affluence; but she had the nature of both parents most harmoniously blended in her own, and it would rise to the surface, however choked and overgrown by the weeds of an uncultivated childhood.

Years had not ameliorated her condition. She was still the household drudge, and as she grew older, and Mrs. Wetherbee, fagged with labor, more of it was assigned to Ethel, until half the work of that great

house was performed by her. Throughout all these years, the last words of her tenderly remembered friend had been her watchword of hope, and with heart and mind steadily fixed on this promised release, she had toiled on.

When the red and white roses of June began to cluster around the porch door, Ethel became restless and abstracted. Half-way across the kitchen her busy feet would pause, and twenty times a day her eyes would fix on the farthest point in the dusty road; was it to catch the first glimpse of the expected one? Twenty times a day she would run to the entrance of the green lane, and watch, and watch until recalled by a shrill voice to her neglected duties. At every opportunity she would steal away to the green nook beneath the river bank, almost expecting to see the reclining form and the glossy steed, but the rosy month had counted its last day, yet her Prince came not.

Then, indeed, the spirit of the lonely child fainted. She grew feverish, and her appetite failed; she could not sleep, and as a consequence her work was negligently performed, and sharp reprimands came thick and fast.

"What is the matter with the brat, I wonder?" snarled Mrs. Wetherbee to her husband one day "I don't know but she is a going to get sick; if she is I'll pack her off to the poorhouse; I won't keep her

on my hands, if she can't pay her way, the lazy baggage."

"That would be a smart go," answered her husband, "to send her to the poorhouse, after making her sick with hard work, a nice talk it would make!"

"Hard work, indeed, Jacob Wetherbee! do you suppose I'm always agoing to keep her and not get any work out of her, nor anything else? let me tell you, work won't hurt anybody, at least it won't hurt you nor her!"

"I don't intend it shall me, but you know, Lucinda, you have always made that girl work like a dog," sullenly retorted her husband.

"I'll risk her," cried his wife, springing up in a rage, for it needed but a word of contrariness to set her boiling at any time.

Ethel was in the pantry, preparing supper, and heard every word of the conversation, and she had heard too many such, not to know the consequence to herself, so when the woman entered the pantry, she expected an assault, nor was she mistaken. Without even an excuse for her cruelty, Mrs. Wetherbee gave the poor girl a blow with the back of her hand, across the eyes, that made her reel. The blow was so wanton, so perfectly malicious, that the outraged child forgot all prudence; with all the strength she could command, she flung the large iron spoon she held, full at the head

Of her tormentor. The woman dodged it, and stood speechless for an instant at the audacity of the hitherto cowering girl. Perfectly livid with rage, when she had time to think, the remorseless wretch seized a heavy goadstick — that stood in the corner of the kitchen — and flew at the now trembling girl and laid it about the fragile form and bowed head, until she stopped from exhaustion; as she did so, Ethel dropped to the floor senseless. Jacob, who had gone out before the last occurrence, now came in, and darting a look of indignation at his wife — lifted the girl and laid her on a low settle in the kitchen.

“I believe you have killed her at last, and I hope you are satisfied,” he said with sternness, almost with dignity. Lucinda made no reply, but thoroughly frightened, set herself to work to restore animation. It was many minutes before she showed signs of returning consciousness, but when she did comprehend her situation, she arose, and with tottering steps left the room, no one offering to prevent her, though the family and the workmen had gathered about the settle. Not a question was asked, for the blood leaving a trace from the swollen nose, and the great blue marks puffed out on the temple and slender arms of the senseless girl, fully explained the scene.

Ethel crawled away towards her garret unopposed, but one of the workmen started forward as she reached

the staircase in the wide entry, and lifting her gently, carried her to her bed.

"Can't I do something for you, sissy? I will if I can."

"No, John," replied Ethel, in a faint, hopeless tone, closing her eyes wearily, and turning her head on the pillows. She did not shed a tear or breathe a sob, she seemed utterly prostrate and heart-broken.

"I wish I could do something for you," again said the kind-hearted man.

"Please leave me, John, please do leave me," and John was obliged to go down, muttering curses as he did so, on the woman, who had so outraged humanity. For Ethel, by her unaffected sweetness in the last few years, had won the love of all the farm hands, old and young, as she had many of the neighbors. When John entered the kitchen, Mrs. Wetherbee was saying:

"I jest dodged it, if it had hit me on the head it would have been sure death. What do you think of that, Mr. John?" she cried out, holding up the spoon.

"What about it?" he asked surlily.

"Why, that beautiful tempered angel threw it at my head."

John made no reply; he would not dissemble, and it would not benefit Ethel for him to speak his mind freely, so he turned on his heel and walked out; and Mrs. Lucinda — feeling more frightened and self-con-

demned than ever before, — did not resent his silence, as she felt like doing. The supper was a gloomy meal, and after they were all through, Lucinda bid her eldest girl “go up and see if Ethel was coming down to her victuals.” It was evident she felt uneasy, though unwilling the family should know it.

“She does n’t want any, mother,” said Susan, soon returning, “and I guess she is pretty mad, for she would not look at me, and she was n’t crying either!”

“Well, let her pout it out, I’ll risk her,” replied the woman. Before retiring, however, Mrs. Wetherbee went up to Ethel’s garret. The exhausted child lay still in the same position that John had left her. She was awake, for though she did not open her eyes as the candle flashed across them, she answered immediately, when addressed.

“Get up and undress, and get into bed.” Her command was less sharp than usual. Without a word or look at her tyrant, Ethel got up, and tried to do as she was bid, but she could not stand, she reeled, and would have fallen had not Mrs. Wetherbee caught her, and without another word, proceeded to undress and lay her in bed; then producing her camphor bottle, bathed her bruised head and limbs, almost gently. She must have felt remorse, if there was a particle of womanly feeling left in her bosom, to see the great discolored bruises on the delicate flesh of this patient,

uncomplaining girl. Not a moan escaped her bloodless lips, until Lucinda lifted one little hand—the fingers of which were frightfully swollen, and in fact the entire hand and arm were much larger than the other—as this hand was lifted and let fall again, Ethel uttered a piercing shriek, and fainted again. The shriek had scarcely died away when John, half dressed, stood beside the woman. He had been wide awake, and listening to every movement. He asked, excitedly—

“What is the matter, ma’am! do you mean to finish with a murder?” Mrs. Wetherbee looked the image of terror, and paid no heed to John’s rough expression.

“Bring her down stairs, quick, we must have her seen to; I’m afraid her arm is sprained or something.” So saying, she took up the candle, and led the way down stairs, followed by John, bearing the nearly lifeless form, and muttering:

“I guess you ’ll find it ‘something,’ before you are through, or my name is not John Lines.” Mrs. Wetherbee did not choose to hear his remarks, but held the candle for him while he laid Ethel on her own bed, then she said to her husband in quite a subdued manner.

“You had better go for a doctor, Jacob, I don’t know what to do for her, or what ails her.”

"You ought to, if anybody," sulkily retorted Jacob, "you did it."

"Well, it is no time to talk now, go for Dr. Cummings, or send John, quick as you can!"

But John had gone, and they heard the thud of hoofs going at full speed towards the village. Jacob nor his wife were able to restore Ethel to more than consciousness of pain, for now and then a low moan breathed through her lips, though she did not reply to a word addressed her.

Doctor Cummings soon arrived, followed closely by John Lines, who had evidently disclosed the facts, for the doctor greeted Mrs. Wetherbee with a mere nod, and walked to the bed. A frown wrinkled on his kindly face, but when his eyes rested upon the sufferer—the bruised temple, the swollen nose, the helpless arm, he turned fiercely to the wretches looking on, and exclaimed,—

"Are you human? to beat and abuse a helpless child in this way. As the Lord liveth, Wetherbee, you shall pay for this!"

"You jest mind your own affairs, Dr. Cummings, if there is anything for you to do!" retorted Mrs. Wetherbee, her temper taking fire at his words as quickly as a fractious horse springs at the spur. "She got no more than she deserved, and if I am to keep the little come-by-chance, she shall do as I tell her, or take the consequence."

Dr. Cummings saw at once that it would be better for his patient if he restrained his indignation, so ordering some bandages he proceeded to dress the little hand, three fingers of which were broken. When Ethel again roused to consciousness, the kind-hearted doctor was sitting beside her bed, bathing her face and limbs in soothing liniment, while Martha — one of the helpers at the dairy — stood by with the candle, the tears rolling fast down her cheeks which she wiped as fast with her apron. When Ethel saw the face of good Doctor Cummings bending over her pillow, she smiled faintly, and put out her uninjured hand. The doctor took it, and touching the bandaged arm, said pityingly, —

“Your fingers are broken, dear, so you must keep very quiet, and get well as soon as possible.” He wanted to add some words of comforting for her to think upon, but his determination to look into her condition had formed itself into no definite plan, so he thought best to wait. After seeing everything done for her that could be, the doctor took his leave for the night, while Martha prepared to remain by her bedside.

It was several weeks before Ethel recovered, and during the time was exempted from labor, and allowed to do as she pleased. Meanwhile her helpless condition was being canvassed by the best people in the village,

and the resolution to take her from her present home — as soon as another could be made ready — was settled, but it was all unknown to Ethel, who — from the time of her terrible beating — had been forming plans of her own. One afternoon the girl was sent to the village store, with the stern injunction “not to stop at a house, if she knew what was best for herself.” Her fingers were still weak, though healed, and it was through the stern interference of Dr. Cummings, that she was permitted to rest so long, and she knew that unremitting labor would soon commence to make up for her long holiday.

She had made her purchases, and was returning towards home, when Mrs. Atkins came out from her poor little house, and accosted her. This good-hearted woman had always shown a most kindly feeling towards Ethel ever since Mrs. Adams' death, and never omitted an opportunity to bestow a pleasant word or little gift, whenever she met her. The consequence was, the lonely child had learned to love plain Mrs. Atkins, dearly, and was sure to run in and see her a minute, whenever sent to the village. She knew Lucinda scorned the family bitterly; the man as a shiftless tippler, and it was too true, the woman as a gossipier, which perhaps, was also true in a measure, but they both had ever a gentle word for Ethel, and she — measuring them by the unerring instinct of her own

soul — read the great, though undeveloped good within them, so loved them for what they were capable, rather than for what they seemed.

“Arn’t you coming in, dear? you look tired, and it has been a long time since you have been to see me.”

“I cannot stop to-day, thank you. Mrs. Wetherbee told me not to go in anybody’s house, though I should like to stop a few minutes.”

“Well, you can come and sit by the door, on this bench, and rest, and have a glass of milk.”

Ethel wished very much to stop, but she dreaded to incur punishment; she could not feel the wrong of disobedience, and she had not respect or love for her cousin as incentive to obey blindly. But while she hesitated, Mrs. Atkins took her by the hand, and led her to the low bench, removed the calico sun-bonnet, and then brought a glass of ice-cold milk which was very refreshing to the weary child. By and by Mrs. Atkins began to tell Ethel about a great city miles away, where she was born, and where a sister was still living in good circumstances. The good-natured woman thought to amuse her listener, nor dreamed of the mischief she was doing, when she told of that sister’s visit to Lincoln while Ethel was sick.

“I told her about you, and she would have taken you home to live with her, and have you learn a trade

— for she is a dressmaker — but Mrs. Wetherbee would not let you go.”

“O, I wish she had taken me!”

“Well, madam Lucinda said you must stay here now you are old enough to work and pay for your bringing up; just as though you had not always worked, poor child!”

“Is it far from here?”

“Yes, it is more than a hundred miles, more than a hundred and fifty miles from here, and costs a great deal of money to go,” answered the woman with a sigh.

“Does the stage that goes by here, go there?” again asked Ethel.

“The stage goes about fifty miles, and then the cars go the rest of the way. Why, you don’t think of going, do you, dear?” Her face was grave, for she feared to pain her little friend if she smiled, as she was tempted to do.

“I have not got money enough,” was the evasive reply, for she did not mean to complicate her friend by telling the scheme her busy brain had planned

“Have you any money, Ethel?”

“Yes, a little, you have given me some, you know; Dr. Cummings has often given me silver pieces, and strangers when they stop at the house for dinner, usually give me money.”

“And you have kept it all?”

"Yes, you know I could buy nothing but candy, and I had rather keep my money."

"You did right, perhaps it may be of use to you sometime, and I will give you this, to put with it," and she pressed a bright half dollar into the little brown palm.

"Ah, you are so good to me," cried Ethel, throwing her arms around her friend's neck. "If ever I do find my father, I shall not forget you." This was the first time Ethel had ever given voice to her hopes even to this woman, and she spoke now with a grave, convinced womanly way that made Mrs. Atkins look at her curiously. "She will not submit much longer to Lucinda's abuse, or I am mistaken," was her silent comment, but replying to the warm caress, she smoothed back the short massy curls, saying, —

"If I had the money, you should go to my sister in spite of Mrs. Wetherbee, as it is, you must try and bear with hard work a little longer, if she does not ill-treat you, but she will never dare to beat you as she has done, and something may turn up for your benefit before long."

"I must go now," said Ethel, rising, "I should rather stay here, but I am afraid she will punish me, and see, there are Susan and Lettie coming from school, and they will tell their mother I stopped, and oh, dear."

"Sit still! the lilac bushes are so thick they may not

see you." Mrs. Atkins did not think the child had done any harm, in resting half an hour, and she wished to shield her from blame. Ethel waited until her cousins were out of sight, and then started for home, hoping they did not notice her; but they did, and hastened with all speed to impart the news; so when she arrived, Lucinda was all ready.

"Didn't I tell you not to stop on the road; you good-for-nothing, and you went in to see that low gadabout, and I forbade you speaking to her time and time again."

"I did not go in," replied Ethel.

"I did not go in," mimicked the woman, "well, you stopped at the door, what is the difference? go and set the table, I'll settle with you to-morrow," she stopped short, as the men began to lounge on the porch, and near the open window of the kitchen, waiting for supper.

As soon as her duties for the day were done, Ethel stole away to her garret, and kneeling by the window, remained long in thought; a far away dreamy expression in the darkly fringed eyes, and the lines around the pretty mouth, settling in a firm resolve. It was still half an hour to sunset, when Ethel rose from her knees, and proceeded to select from her scanty wardrobe such articles as she desired. Folding her one decent calico dress, with a change of

under-clothes — all she had — and putting them in a canvass bag, together with the book belonging to her Prince. Hiding the satchel, so should any one come up, it would not be noticed, she laid her best frock — a dark gingham with a cape of the same — near by her only shoes and a coarse straw bonnet, where she could get them in the dark, then she sat down and waited by the window.

It seemed as though the sun lingered longer than ever before on the edge of the horizon, flinging a veil of golden enchantment over the scene. The opposite banks of the softly rippling river were purpling in the creeping twilight, while the tall sighing pines and rustling maples, cast long undulating shadows across the smooth shaven fields, that lay in level acres above and below the house, and extending back to the forest of gloomy cedars from which the farm took its name. Ethel had looked upon the tranquil beauty of the place many times at this hour, and the picture never passed from her memory, though blended with its loveliness, were wrongs and sufferings seldom met in the drama of childhood.

At last the sun went down; his last lingering rays of gold meeting and blending with the white ones of the round August moon just rising in the east. Ethel waited still, waited until every sound of waking life was hushed, before she made a move.

John and Martha were snoring in concert, he in the garret, and she in the chamber below, with the children. She had no fear of Jacob, but his wife, how could she go down the creaking stairs, enter the unused room, without waking Lucinda. But she must do it. She must have the red sparkling cross, so long laid away in her grandma's bureau. Mrs. Wetherbee said long ago it might serve to find her father, so she must not go without it, beside it was her very own, she was to have it when she was eighteen, but as she was going away, she must have it now. With the lightness of a cat she crept down the stairs, entered the forbidden room. The moon gave plenty of light, and going direct to the bureau she opened the right drawer the first time, for she had not forgotten where she had seen the box put away eight years before. With tremulous fingers she applied the key, and opened the lid; feeling at the bottom of the casket she found the glittering bauble. Without a moments' delay she put the chain around her neck, locked the box, and carefully returning it to its place, closed the drawer and prepared to retrace her steps over the stairs. Now that she had the cross, her heart beat as though it would burst through her bosom. She crushed her hands upon it, as though that would hush its loud throbs, and cautiously leaving the moonlighted room, groped her way back to the side of her bed.

Not a creak, not a jar, not the faintest sound had betrayed her going or coming, and now, with thankful heart she knelt, and breathed her simple prayer for protection. She was too young to realize all the danger of going alone into the great world; indeed, she knew nothing about it; her only thought was to escape her present cruel bondage; she would brave death itself, to escape from her tyrannical mistress.

Quickly changing her old frock for the gingham one, and putting on her cape and bonnet, and taking her shoes and satchel in her hand, she lightly descended the grape-vine to the ground; pausing here but for one moment to listen, Ethel darted away towards the south village, nor slackened her pace until a safe distance lay between her and the farmhouse.

The next morning, breakfast was nearly ready, and Ethel did not appear. Mrs. Wetherbee was in a towering passion. "The lazy jade! she will find I'll put up with this no longer! She has done nothing long enough, now she shall go to work!" There were none of the children present, for they were not yet up, and Martha was milking, so going to the stairs, she called "Ethel! Ethel!" several times at the top of her voice, but to no purpose. "The little wretch!" and striding over the stairs, and up over the garret flight with a force that made them bend, she rushed

to the cot with the intention of dragging Ethel out of bed. She quite reached it before she perceived it was unoccupied, and then, her breathless, helpless stare was amusing. A coarse dress and apron were flung across the bed, so she thought that the girl had fled never entered her head. Returning down stairs she made the air vocal with the name of Ethel.

"The hussy! She has gone to the village, thinking to return before I could find it out; won't she catch it when she comes back!"

When the family gathered around the breakfast table, Lucinda inquired if any of them heard Ethel go out quite early in the morning. "Well," she went on in answer to their negative, "She has gone, and wore her best dress and bonnet; I suppose she expected to get back before I was up."

The work-hands exchanged glances, but said nothing, while Jacob growled, "The doors, front and back were locked, and so were the windows below, for I unfastened them myself." Lucinda commenced a tart reply, but Susan, who had rushed to the attic at the first mention of Ethel's absence, now came tearing down with eyes stretched to their uttermost.

"Why mother! she has taken my satchel, that hung in the entry, and her new calico dress, and some other things."

"She has run away!" cried Mrs. Wetherbee, "and

I'll warrant the satchel is not the only thing she has stolen, but she'll soon be glad to come back, and when she does!" a flash of the black eyes, and compression of the thin lips completed the sentence.

"The satchel was her mother's, and belonged to Ethel, if anybody," munched Jacob, as he disposed of a huge mouthful of corncake.

"Her's indeed, Jacob Wetherbee! she had no right to her own name, letting alone anything else, but if you want to uphold the trollop against your own wife, you can do so, it's not the first time."

Jacob made no reply, but going out soon after, he harnessed a horse to the light wagon, and came in for his coat.

"Where are you going? I thought you were in a great hurry to get on with the harvesting, while all these men are here, eating us up, and doing nothing unless looked after."

"Well, you may drive them yourself, to-day; I am going to look up the gal," he answered determinedly.

"Fudge, I'll risk her! stay and tend your own business, and I'll send to old mother Atkins, and I should not wonder if I found her there; she can't have gone far, any way."

"I shan't run the risk of having her starve on the road," he replied sturdily.

"I guess there is no danger," snarled the woman,

"but go along, if you want to, and I'll take it out of her hide when she comes back!"

"You look a here, Lucinda! you shall never tech that gal agin. I have tole you and tole you what would be to pay, if you beat her so beyond all reason; the church has taken it in hand, and a pretty mess they'll make of it; there's no knowing what they'll do, if she is lost or killed." Mrs. Wetherbee stood speechless with anger and astonishment.

"Where did you hear this, and why did n't you tell me?"

"I heard it yesterday. I met Dr. Cummings out here, and he said a committee would be here to-day, and that Squire Wilson is going to take her. It seems the folks have been waiting for the judge to come back from Europe, before making a move. For my part, I'll be glad to give her up."

"You had, no doubt! but I had not, just as she is getting big enough to be of use. Let them come, and they'll git a piece of my mind, I can tell you. The town cannot have her unless they pay me well for keeping her these eight years."

"Wal," said Jacob, getting into his wagon, "you need not look for me 'til I come, I mean to find her, if a thorough search will do it." I need hardly say his search was fruitless. He went to Mrs. Atkins, who protested so earnestly that she had not seen Ethel

since the day before, and was so anxious, Jacob was obliged to believe her. He visited several houses, but of course, the result was the same, no one had seen her. Everybody was curious, but little satisfaction could be gained from the more than usual reticent man, and he drove away towards the north for a short distance, then turned and drove south as far as the next village, but not a trace of the runaway could be found.

The news soon spread, and various were the comments. Good Dr. Cummings was really grieved; he had seen more of the rare child, and marked her fortitude and sweetness under suffering, her prettiness of speech and manner, and felt conscience-stricken that she had been allowed to live in abuse so long — rather from apathy and misunderstanding of her condition, than hard-heartedness. It is true, the greater portion of the neighborhood cared little about her, any way, but the matter served a new theme for gossip for many days, and a few tender hearts fretted, and shed tears more than once for the missing child.

"Oh," said poor Mrs. Atkins to her husband, "had I mistrusted she was resolved to go, I would have seen that she had money enough, and sent her safely to my sister. Just think, Joseph, what if our little May, or Ellen, or even little Tom were left alone like that poor dear," and tears fell from every eye in that poor cot-

tage. Shiftless Joe said nothing, but he resolved then, as he nestled bright-eyed little Tom to his breast, to try and get ahead for the sake of his children, and he did go steadily upward from that hour. Ah! God bless the little ones if conceived in love, though they bring us care, sleepless nights, and toiling days.

A few weeks after all search was given up, word came that a pale, slender girl, every way answering Ethel's description, was seen to enter the cars at Concord, and marked by the conductor as going to Boston, but no farther trace was found.

"It could not have been Ethel," said Jacob Wetherbee.

"Why not?" asked his wife.

"Because it costs money to ride in the steam cars, and that girl had no money, leastwise she had no means of getting any, and we have n't missed any."

"Perhaps it was given her," said Mrs. Wetherbee sharply, looking at the men who were quietly eating their supper.

"If you mean me, ma'am," spoke up John Lines stoutly, "I can set your heart at rest. I never gave the girl money, unless now and then a dime to buy candy, but if I had a thought or known she had wanted money, or had an idea of going away, I would have given it to her with all my heart." Mrs. Wetherbee thought it best to say nothing more to the plain-

spoken fellow ; she had felt some fear of him ever since the night he had appeared so suddenly by her side, when Ethel fainted.

"I know where the slut got her money!" cried Mrs. Wetherbee, after a minutes' thought, "the meat, butter, and cheese have been going off for some time back, she has sold it." All present looked incredulous, even Jacob scouted the idea.

"It's all nonsense! who would buy the stuff from a child like that?"

"I can tell you! the ones that set her up to it, the low wretches that she would sneak in to see, in spite of all I could say to prevent."

"You mean the Atkins?" asked Jacob, bluntly.

"Well, yes, they can't hang me for what I think, and I am satisfied that they have helped her away, and she paid them in stuff she stole!"

"I don't believe a word of it," said John, indignantly, "Joe loves his tippie, consequently wastes his time and money, but he is no thief; and there is not a finer woman in this town than Lizzie Atkins."

"O, you need not get mad, I have my reasons for what I say and think, and I have no doubt of what I say," and thus a most false and cruel story was put in circulation, and for a time the Atkins were under a cloud of suspicion.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE "COMMON PEOPLE."

"In whatso we share with another's need;
Not what we give, but what we share,—
For the giver without the gift is bare;
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,—
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me."—LOWELL.



NOW let us follow our little one. With an understanding beyond her years, she calculated her proceedings. She knew if she failed and was brought back, she would be far more wretched than before she made the attempt, for added to the unpardonable act of running away, would be added the crime of taking the ruby cross, for though it was really her own, she knew the punishment for taking it would be dreadful. With the instinct for self-preservation, she had secreted as much plain bread as she could carry in her sachel, beside her few articles of wearing apparel. All the night long she walked the dewy path by the roadside, the full, round moon lighting up the gray, shadowy scene with a radiance almost as bright as day. If the sound of a chance carriage vibrated on the air, she stepped aside and let it pass; thus she went her way, unseen by

any one save the loving spirit, walking ever by her side.

When morning was so far advanced that workmen began to be abroad, she crept into a green nook near the road, sheltered by dense growing pines, and with her sachel for a pillow, lay down and slept a sweet, dreamless sleep of exhaustion. When she awoke, it was not far from sunset; and her stomach was craving food. Around her in rank luxuriance grew the wine-hued whortleberries, so gathering a quantity in a little while, Ethel sat down by a stream that gurgled by a short distance farther into the pasture, and still concealed by the low-growing bushes, eat of her bread and berries until her hunger was appeased. By the remaining day-light, she gathered as many berries as she could well carry, and as soon as the hour rendered it safe, she commenced her journey, little thinking Jacob Wetherbee was within a few rods of her retreat during the afternoon.

For a week she went on thus, without speaking or showing herself to a human being, subsisting entirely on berries when her bread was gone, and milking from the cows by the roadside, when she found them there. She knew she was on the right road by the stage that passed every day or night, therefore it was safer and surer to go on as she did. Finally, when by guideboards and other signs she knew she was near the rail-

road terminus, she ventured to stop at a farmhouse, and learn how far Concord was away, and if she could find courage, to ask for some food. It was early morning, before breakfast, that she knocked timidly at a side door, and the odorous food to the weary, hungry girl was almost overpowering, and she faintly asked for some water. The man who opened the door, without a word took her hand, and led her into the kitchen, and instead of water gave her milk just from the cow.

"Have you walked far?" asked a pleasant-faced woman, who was getting the breakfast ready.

"Yes ma'am, several miles," answered Ethel, "I wish to go to Concord, is it much farther?"

"No, it is only yonder about five miles."

"Do you know what time the cars start for Boston?"

"There are three trains. One at half-past seven, the next at eleven, and the next at three," replied the man who had been earnestly regarding her.

"I wish I could go in the first train this morning, but I cannot get there in time," sighed Ethel, looking at the clock. It was half-past five.

"I am going over after breakfast, and will take you in my wagon, if you will wait," again replied the man, exchanging glances with his wife, who nodded.

"O will you, sir? I shall be so glad!" cried Ethel, tears of gladness and perhaps weakness starting to her eyes.

"Come, you must go in the cars, it is nearly time to start." He took her satchel, and led the way; seeing her nicely seated, he shook hands with her, and said "good-bye" with real feeling of concern. Meeting the conductor, he pointed out the diminutive traveller, and begged his interest for her. It was promised, and he fulfilled his promise.

It was late in the afternoon when the cars steamed into the depot of the metropolis. Ethel was placed in a hack by the conductor, who bid the driver carry her to the street and number inscribed on the letter, which the girl carried in her hand. It was soon reached, a nice house in a quiet street, and helping Ethel to alight, the driver ran up the steps and rang the bell loudly, then turned courteously and asked for his fare.

"How much, sir?" asked Ethel, dropping her eyes at the admiring and rude stare of her conductor.

"Twenty-five cents, Miss," and then as no answer came to the first ring, the hackman tried the second and louder peal, then springing on to his coach disappeared. None came to the door, and after ringing the bell again, Ethel sat down upon the steps and began to cry. She was warm, and oh, so tired, confused with the noise of rolling vehicles, the shouts and clamors of the great city, and bewildered by the ever-changing, constant passing mass of human beings before her.

"O dear! what shall I do if the lady is not at home,"

thought Ethel, "I must find some place to work, not loiter here." At this moment a lady who had been sitting at the window of the adjoining house, asked :

"Did you wish to see Mrs. Churchill, little girl?"

Ethel looked up hopefully, then glanced at the letter she held.

"Yes ma'am."

"She has gone out of the city for the summer, so it will be of no use to wait. Are you a stranger here?"

"Yes ma'am, I want to get a place to work, and I was told to bring this letter to Mrs. Churchill, and she would help me. Do you know of any one who wants a girl?" The lady smiled, she was pretty and pleasant, and Ethel knew she would befriend her.

"I do not think of any now, have you no friends in the city?"

Ethel shook her head, the tears were just ready to fall again, and oh, she was so weary, and felt so lonely, still she did not wish herself back. A thought came to the lady, as she regarded the weary child, and she turned and addressed a companion older than herself.

"Come in, little girl, while I write a note, I will see what I can do for you."

Ethel did not know where to look for the door, and the young lady seeing this, went herself and opened it. Leading the way to the pleasant breakfast-room, and giving her a seat on an ottoman, bid her take her bon-

net off while she rested, and then asking a few questions as to her ability, proceeded to write a tiny note, which she gave to Ethel, saying, —

“I know a lady, who has a little boy two years old, and she is desirous of getting a girl who will be neat in her own person, and faithful in her duties, to take the care of him. Do you think you would like to go there?”

“O yes, ma’am, I would be willing to do anything I could, and thank you very much.”

“Do you think you can find the street?” asked the young lady, musing doubtfully. Ethel’s bright look clouded.

“I don’t know, I am sure, but I can try.”

“You had better send Hannah with her,” said the elder lady.

“Yes, I think that would be the better way.” So Hannah was called from the kitchen, and willingly consented to guide the little girl to H—— street. Ethel went very contentedly with Hannah through crowds of people, through interminable streets, turning and turning again, this way and that, so bewildering the country-bred child, that she could not have retraced her steps two streets without a guide. When they reached the house designated, Hannah left Ethel, and in answer to her timid ring, a servant ushered her into the presence of a thin, sallow-looking young woman, dressed

in a white cambric wrapper, and very indolently reclining in an easy chair. She languidly opened her pale, blue eyes, and in a dreary voice wished to know what the young person wanted.

"She comes for a place, as nurse to Master Freddy," explained the servant, handing the note.

The woman read it, and then told Ethel she might sit and wait until Mr. Seymore came home; it was a great exertion for Mrs. Seymore to read the note, therefore she again closed her eyes, settling herself comfortably for a nap, leaving poor tired Ethel to sit upright with her bonnet on, hot, weary, and faint. But no matter, she was only a common person looking for service. But no, perhaps I wrong the woman somewhat, I don't think it was unkindness, only as selfishness is always more or less unkind, but she was destitute of those warm, sympathetic impulses, that make the true woman so quick to discover discomforts, and so earnest to alleviate them.

It was full two hours before the Rev. Charles Seymore came home. He entered the room with a brisk, airy step, vigorously running his fingers through his lank, light hair, until it stuck up or out, all over his head. Uttering a quick word of greeting to his wife, which was languidly returned, he whirled on his heel, and confronted Ethel with a stare that made her blush painfully.

"Who have we here, Mrs. Seymore?"

"It is a nursery maid, sent by Miss Macy," handing the note, "won't you see if she will answer, Charles?"

The Reverend gentleman read the note, then drew a chair beside the girl, and at once began to question her.

"What is your name?"

"Ethel Lester."

"From what part of the country did you come?"

Ethel named her native place, but he shook his head.

"Too far, too far to send for a recommendation."

Ethel looked puzzled, she did not know that a poor girl must have the most flourishing recommendations in order to earn her bread.

"Are you used to children, and fond of them?" was the next question.

"Yes sir," to both questions. After the gentleman had quizzed the frightened child on nearly every subject, and learned all there was to learn about herself, he suddenly asked:

"Are you a member of any church?"

"No sir."

"Indeed, is it possible? then you will not do for us. We cannot trust our dear child in the care of a maid, unless she has experienced a change of heart; and we cannot employ a girl, unless she can show good reference as to character and disposition. I am afraid you

will have trouble to get a respectable situation without it. You may go now," and the Rev. Charles Seymore, vicegerent of the perfect Man, a preacher of Love and Charity, held the door for this little waif to pass into the street already darkening, well knowing she was an utter stranger in the city, without a place to lay her head.

Quite a number of years after this occurrence, I heard the Rev. Charles deliver a discourse on the Social Evil. He did it justice. There was scarcely a dry eye or closed hand in the very large assembly. But I remembered the inexperienced girl of fourteen, the darkening streets, and the slam of the heavy door, and I thought I would keep my dollar for similar cases, should I ever chance to meet them; having more faith in one sound apple than a bushel of tainted ones.

Ethel's heart was too full to answer his "good-day," and as the street door closed behind her, her sense of desolation and inexperience hung about her like a nightmare. The street lamps were lighted, and the sidewalks were damp with the falling rain, and the air, so sultry before sunset, was chill as autumn, thus sudden are the changes on our northern seacoast.

Not knowing which way to turn, the weary child sat down on some granite steps, sheltered by an awning, and in spite of hunger, loneliness, or cold, was soon fast asleep. Perhaps an hour had elapsed, when she was

awakened by a firm hand grasping her arm, and giving her a gentle shake, at the same time a kindly voice exclaimed :

“Wake up, wake up, child ! or the police will be hold of yer, and yer ’ll get your death a cold beside.”

Ethel started up, and stood bewildered, but the flaring lights, the narrow streets, the falling rain, soon recalled her homeless strait, and shrinking back, and covering her face with her hands, sobbed hopelessly.

“See, mother, yer ’ve made her cry,” said a boy about Ethel’s age, who stood near a large basket of vegetables. They had evidently been to market. His mother, a stout woman, coarsely dressed, bent over the sobbing child, and said gently :

“I didn’t mean to frighten yer, dear, but yer had better go home, the mother ’ll be fretting about yer. If yer ’ve lost yer way, my boy ’ll show yer, if yer ’ll tell us where yer live,” coaxingly added the woman, as Ethel did not reply.

“I have no mother nor home, and I don’t know where to go,” the worn-out child found voice to say.

“The Lord help us and preserve us, poor thing, is that the truth ? well, well, I thought yer looked like a stranger.” Ethel had ceased to sob, and rising and taking her bag, asked falteringly :

“If you would be so good as to tell me some place to stay all night, I have some money to pay for my

lodging and supper, and she offered her purse to the woman, who was curiously watching her.

“Put away yer money, child, I don’t want it, Lord love yer, no! If yer’ll come home with me, I guess I can find a place for yer to sleep. I’ve got a home, if it be a poor one, and I’ll not leave a little thing like yer, in the street, to be snapped up by nobody knows who!” The broad, ruddy face beamed with a beauty understood by angels and children, so Ethel cried piteously:

“O do take me home with you! I shall be so thankful.”

“Well, come along then,” and motioning the boy to go along, she followed, the weary, grateful child beside her. Very unwise, very imprudent, don’t you think so, my reader? to take her without a reference, but then, you see, she was only common clay, this poor woman, and possessed only common goodness, therefore, was in no danger of contamination. It was a tenement house, in a poor street, up two or three flights of stairs, then into a large room, neatly kept, where a man sat reading the evening paper, and several children were quietly at work or play.

“Who have we here, Charlotte?” asked the man, looking up from his paper.

“It be a poor little girl, Thomas, a stranger in the city, where she be come for work; she fell asleep on

some steps, she was so tired, and so I thought, as she had no place to go, I would bring her home with me." While she was speaking, the good soul had seated her guest, and removed her bonnet, and taken her bag.

"You did right, Charlotte, and now the best thing you can do is to give her some supper and put her to bed. Ain't you tired, Miss?"

"O, very tired, sir!"

"Lauk-a-day, Thomas, isn't she purty?" whispered Mrs. Brent, when she had laid the remains of their frugal supper before the girl. He nodded.

As soon as the weary one had eaten, Mrs. Brent conducted her to an inner room, a mere closet, in fact, to a clean bed, and where sleep, loving nurse, soon hushed her to forgetfulness; while the man and woman shared the bed made on the floor for the children, in the large room.

It was late on the following day when Ethel awoke from her deep sleep; she found her hostess alone with her two youngest children, diligently sewing on some coarse jackets.

"How do you feel this morning?" she asked pleasantly, returning the shy greeting.

"I feel ever so much better, thank you."

"Well, you sit right down here, and have some breakfast. It has cleared off real pleasant, and if you like, you may go with me to carry this work home,

when the children get in from school, and I will take you to Mrs. Gleason's, the lady I told you about last night, if you are rested enough to go."

"O, yes indeed," and after thinking a little, she asked, "Do you think the lady will take me?"

"I am sure she will, if she has not got a nursery girl, and if she has, she will find you a place, for she is an angel of a woman, full of loving kindness to all her fellow creeters."

"I was afraid I could not get a place."

"Why, child?"

"The gentleman to whom I was sent last night, said I could not get work without reference; what is that, Mrs. Brent, I know, of course, what the word means, but how can I refer to any one, when I have never worked out?"

"Reference indeed! you carry it in your face, if a body had sense to read. Don't you fret, my beautiful lady will take care of you, she has been an angel to more than one poor soul."

Ethel made a hearty breakfast from the relishable food set before her, and when the elder children came home, she went out on the street with her good friend. A walk of half an hour brought them to an elegant dwelling, in the finest part of the city. Mrs. Brent did not approach the wide, marble steps that led to the principal entrance, but entered the area door, that led

to the kitchen. Here she was welcomed as one well known and liked, and one of the maids went at once to let Mrs. Gleason know that Mrs. Brent waited to speak with her.

"You can take the little maid with you, my lady says, she is alone, and will see you in her own room," and the pleasant-spoken footman held the door for them to pass.

It was a cosy room, with one long, wide French window, opening on a tiny balcony overhanging the garden, and another, thrown wide into a cool, shadowy conservatory, where a thread-like fountain tinkled back into a marble basin, thence to a fern-lined aquarium, where the gold fish flashed. To country-bred Ethel, it seemed a fairy palace, and its costly and tasteful arrangements filled her with intense enjoyment. She did not feel out of place, as did her companion, but seated herself at the bidding of the beautiful lady, without embarrassment, yet with a look of shy wonder in her fair, childish face. She was too young to analyze her feelings; she did not try to do so, she was only conscious of perfect content without fear. Children are acute readers of the human countenance, and our little wanderer read only compassion and goodness in the one before her.

She was a fair, noble-looking matron of perhaps twenty-eight, dressed in a becoming morning toilet.

Her eyes were dark, blue and tender, and her smile one of rare sweetness.

"Sit down, Mrs. Brent, you look tired," she said graciously, and then, after inquiring about the family, and receiving satisfactory answers, she continued:

"James says you have brought me a nursery maid; you are very kind, where did you find her?"

Here Mrs. Brent related her meeting with Ethel, and as much of the child's story as she knew herself, and ending with the remark, "I knew you would know what to do for her, even if you did not need her yourself."

I thank you, my good friend, you did right in bringing her here. I have supplied myself with a maid old enough to take all the care of my little ones, but I will keep this girl," — went on the lady, who had scarcely taken her eyes from Ethel since she came in — if she would like to stay, to wait on me, and keep near me, and I may be able to bring her up usefully."

"Ah! that you will, madam," earnestly responded Mrs. Brent, "make a curtesy, child, to this good lady, who is going to give you such a nice home."

Ethel did not curtesy, but said, in her own pretty way, as she approached Mrs. Gleason:

"I do wish to stay with you, very much, and I will learn all you are so good as to teach me, and obey you always." Mrs. Gleason looked at her with pleased surprise, and answered:

"I have no doubt you will, Ethel, your name is Ethel?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Well, I will give you a room near my own; Jane will show you. There, you may take off your bonnet, and come back to me. Mrs. Brent, will you pull the bell-cord beside you?" Ethel rang the bell, then turning to her humble friend, said, as she laid her hand on the broad shoulder: "I am most thankful for your kindness, and for getting me this nice home, I will deserve it, it is the only way I can repay you."

"Don't mention it, miss, only be good to this lady. I knew she would take care of you."

Jane now came in, and obeying the order of her mistress, led Ethel to a small chamber, opening into that of Mrs. Gleason's, also into the wide, upper hall.

"She is a strangely interesting child," said the lady musingly. "I cannot account for the feeling with which she inspires me; I do not believe I could send her out to service sooner than I could my own daughter."

"She is a strange child," answered Mrs. Brent, rising to go, "she seems to know so little, yet she has such an old-fashioned way, and says everything just right."

"Wait one moment, until Jane comes, I have sent for a dress, which I do not like very well; you must

accept it, and make two, for your little girls; I think there will be enough in it for two. Ah, here it is," she continued, as Jane entered, bringing a pretty colored dress of challie, and not allowing the grateful woman to express her thanks, proceeded to show how the two garments could be made.

"The good Lord bless you, madam," was the parting salutation of Mrs. Brent, going out one door, as Ethel came in at the other. Mrs. Gleason smiled as the little girl came in, and pointed to a low ottoman at her feet, upon which Ethel seated herself, and folded her hands in her lap, waited to be spoken to. For many minutes, the lady perused the sweet, pensive face in silence, as though trying to solve something she read there. By and by, she commenced to ask questions, and draw the girl out. She listened with interest and sympathy to the story of that young life. She felt sure there was no exaggeration, as the simple and appropriate words fell from the truthful lips, and when it was ended, the downcast eyes were raised for the first time to hers, to read the verdict therefrom. It must have been favorable, for immediately Ethel said :

"You do not blame me, do you, madam, for coming away?"

"No, I do not blame you; you had a very sad life; but if you are content to live with me, you shall never be ill-treated, nor want for a home again."





Ethel bent and kissed the white hand resting on the arm of the chair nearest her, unconscious of the grace and naturalness of the act.—

Ethel bent, and kissed the white hand resting on the arm of the chair nearest to her, unconscious of the grace and naturalness of the act. Not so Mr. Gleason, who paused unperceived, on the threshold; the tableau pleased him.

"Very pretty, upon my word, Helen," he said, smilingly coming near, "who is this, my dear, making love to you so ardently?" Mrs. Gleason started, and the soft peach bloom deepened on her cheeks a little, and the dancing lovelight set sparkling the tears that were ready to fall.

"Listener!" she cried, playfully shaking her finger at him, and then changing her tone. "O, Arthur! I have been listening to the saddest story. This little girl, whom good Mrs. Brent brought to me for a nursery maid, has told me her's. I think I shall keep her near me, as a kind of body guard, if you have no objections." And a questioning smile dimpled her lips.

"I? objections? of course not, dear wife, if it please you to keep her. If it rested with me, you should have a retinue, numerous as a queen; but she does not look like a common child," said Mr. Gleason, observing Ethel closely; she stood at a little distance, her face upturned, watching a green-winged canary, swinging over her head.

"Common? O, no! she is not that, certainly not that, though as far as I can conjecture, from her story,

a child of misfortune. I will tell you sometime if you wish to hear it, but look now! look Arthur, what a likeness!"

"Likeness, dear, of whom?"

"I know you will laugh at me, Arthur, but I cannot look at that girl without thinking of my brother."

"Your brother Percy?"

"Yes. I was but fourteen, when he went away, so that his image is somewhat indistinct perhaps, but I cannot look at her when her eyes are downcast, but that a vision of him comes stealing into my heart; however, when she lifts her eyes, it flits away. It may be this fancied likeness, that decided me to keep her."

"Well darling, follow your inclination, and you cannot go far wrong, and she is lovely enough even to resemble a Vernon. Now we will defer the subject until another time; I have come for you and the little ones to ride, this bright day; put on your things, for the horses are impatient by this time."



CHAPTER X.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

"Rich in love and sweet humanity." — WORDSWORTH.



MY friend, you have already surmised the maiden name of Mrs. Gleason. Helen Vernon, the beloved pupil of Gertrude Lester, and now; the warm-hearted protectress of her child. She had fulfilled the promise of her childhood, and matured into a high-souled, lovely woman, with all true and kindly impulses uncurbed, and love and charity, boundless as the ocean; she inherited not only her father's blue eyes and hair of golden chestnut, but his pure, fine nature.

She married at an early age a man every way worthy of her. He was poor, but her father approved, and in spite of her haughty mother's displeasure, and her sister's scorn, she wedded the man of her choice, and he had now, by a judicious use of her dowry, become one of the leading men of his native city in wealth and influence; while his wife with an overflowing purse, a wise judgment, and sympathetic heart, turned many feet from the enticing slope that leads to wretchedness;

then instead of complacently feeling her whole work done, brought them within her purer magnetism, and so created a desire for a better life; and then, with purse and influence, one or both, placed them in a position where the higher and protective traits of their own souls made the fight against temptation more equal. Ah! there are some dwelling among us, who have more of Heaven than Earth in their organizations, and Helen Gleason was one.

Ethel was not very long becoming accustomed to her splendid home, to which, shall we call it fate?—had led her. Her position, it is true, was that of a servant, nominally, but a servant to a most indulgent and considerate mistress. Pretty and becoming dresses were provided for her, and she ate with the children, and walked with them and their nurse every day, and rode with them and their parents. She was constantly with her mistress, whom she grew to love dearly, sewing or reading, drawing or studying, for Helen loved to have the fair creature, half child, half woman, near her, to run and execute some command, or task, so deftly, so comprehensively, as often to surprise her.

Like a royal tropic flower, hidden by chance in some dank cellar or gloomy ravine, putting forth only a few pale leaves, as a tiny ray of light penetrated the uncongenial abode, though the stunted tendrils were ever groping upward to the sunbeam and air. The delicate

hues, and graceful corolla were there, but folded away in the close embrace of the outer leaves. Transplanted to its native clime, the stock flourished, the leaves expanded, and the flower unfolded, leaf by leaf, to the wooing breeze, and receiving the ardent sun-kiss in its bosom, deepened and glowed in color and strength, until almost before the watching eye could realize a change so sudden, a glorious blossom hung tremulous on the stem.

And so with Ethel. Under the influence of kindness and congenial surroundings, her nature and intellect, royal and aspiring, burst their bond of circumstance, and she changed from a shy, drooping child, to a blooming, intelligent maiden, her heart swelling with love, for the dear ones around her, her brain teeming with thoughts, almost overwhelming in their strength and suddenness, and again seeming in her clearer vision, as nothing new, but a part of herself. She shrank from speaking of her former life, or her parents, as her comprehensive mind recalled the taunts and slurs cast upon her defenseless head, and the cruel epithets heaped upon her dead mother.

Poor Ethel, poor girl, she was too happy for tears, but the sorrow and shame of her baby years cast a shadow in the large, fathomless eyes, lurked in the curve of the red mouth, and vibrated in the tones of her sweet, young voice.

One more glimpse of the bud, we will pass on to the opening flower.

Playing one day, in the presence of her mistress, with the three romping, loving children, Ethel sat quietly down, as was her wont, when Mr. Gleason came in, to take them to their accustomed ride. Throwing a letter into his wife's lap, he exclaimed, as he tossed the youngest pet above his head,—

“That foolish boy, Guy, has returned from his escapade to the White Mountains, and is confined to his bed again. I hope he will keep quiet now, until he gets quite well, for it would kill Madame Casā to lose him.”

“I hope so, indeed,” returned Helen, opening the letter, “he was not able to sit up, when he went away; I have often wondered what could have been his purpose, something worthy, I am sure, for Guy Casā never does anything without a purpose, or unworthily.”

At the first mention of that name, Ethel listened breathlessly, to catch every word. Was it her Guy? the Guy who was coming for her if he lived? and for whom she had waited so hopefully, all through the burning summer days? it might be so; it seemed to her there was only one Guy in the world. She did not need his kindness now, yet still, thoughts of him were ever present in her sleeping or waking hours, and when she heard her benefactor speak his name, how she

longed to ask where he lived, and how he looked, but our little Ethel already felt the springs of womanhood whispering within, and she dared not ask a question which she could not explain, except by unfolding a leaf in the past sacred to herself and memory. They might laugh at her, or blame her, either would be torture, sensitively organized as she was ; but when the radiant, ten-year-old Alice came to her side, she whispered :

“ Do you know who Guy is ? ”

• “ Yes, Guy is my cousin, and lives in New York with Aunt Alice, and he is going to marry me, when I am a woman ! ” and Alice tossed her yellow curls, and tried to look as womanly as the occasion required.

Mrs. Gleason look surprised, and Mr. Gleason smiled and said :

“ Fie, Allie ! young ladies do not declare their intentions, until the gentleman proposes.”

“ Well, Guy did propose, when he was here last winter with Aunt Alice. One day, when Aunt Alice was talking to him about studying law, she told him he must never think of marrying any but a rich wife, and he had better wait for me, then he laughed, and asked me if I would marry him.”

“ And what did Miss Gleason say ? ” asked papa, amused.

“ I said, yes, if papa was willing. Then he laughed again, and asked Aunt Alice if he had better see Uncle

Arthur that evening, and she said there would be time enough, when I became a young lady, and told him to be serious."

Mr. Gleason glanced at his wife, but she looked troubled. "I wish they would not put such thoughts into a child's head."

Ethel noticed all these things, and thought of them over and over again, wondering if it was her Guy, that Alice was to marry, and turning her eyes inward, perused the brave, laughing face, engraved on her heart. How plain were the dark, pitying eyes, the close-cut curls of sunny, auburn hair, the warm kiss, and the clasp of that firm hand. Then she would sigh, poor child, she knew not yet why, and wonder if she should ever see him again.

The Christmas holidays were drawing near, and the children, from dainty Alice to baby May, were jubilant at the thought of spending them at "The Rocks," grandpapa's place up the Hudson. Mr. Gleason had business that required his presence south, most of the winter, so it was decided, at the earnest desire of her mother, whose health was failing fast, that Mrs. Gleason should spend the winter at "The Rocks," her childhood's home. The house in the city was to be closed, the servants, who desired to stay, put on board wages, except the housekeeper, and those who accompanied the family.

"What will you do with Ethel?" Mr. Gleason inquired one day, while discussing the arrangements.

"I do not quite know, it will be very dull for her here."

"Unless you send her to school."

"True, I have thought of that. But I do not see how I can do without her, she is such a useful little thing, and the children will miss her so much."

"Then take her with you, why not?"

"Do you think I had better? Jane and Agnes are indispensable, and mother always has such a crowd of servants. But there is certainly room enough," she concluded.

"Well, do just as you think best, Helen. There is certainly room enough, as you say, and I think it will be as much to the girl's advantage, to remain with you, as to go to school, so if you think it will add to your convenience, to have her near you, take her by all means."

"If I consulted my own pleasure, I should not hesitate; but you know that neither mother nor sister are very considerate towards those who serve, and my little maid is so sensitive. However, I think I will take her."

Thus it was decided that Ethel should go, and so the Christmas of her fifteenth year dawned upon her in the grand old mansion, from whence her mother

was driven, crushed, heart-broken to die. Fifteen years had not passed without leaving their impress on the inmates of "The Rocks." Mr. Vernon, still genial and vigorous, was unbowed beneath his sixty winters, though they had sprinkled a few snows amid his abundant locks. His friendly smile was still the same, but the deep lines on his brow, and around his mouth, were not all the work of years. The continued absence of his beloved son, and his unaccountable silence, for all home letters were answered by the faithful companion, perplexed, and most deeply grieved him.

One would scarcely recognize the fair and stately Mrs. Vernon of old, in the tremulous, attenuated figure, reclining from morning until night in her easy chair. She dressed with scrupulous care, and her bearing was proud as ever, but the fine eyes were sunken, though brilliant, and the ebon hair, satin smooth as ever, was changing fast to gray. Remorse, pride, and idolatrous love for her absent boy struggling at her heart, left their marks on her faded features.

Alice was yet very beautiful, though her short, unhappy married life, cankered her heart, and disappointed her ambition.

It was the night before Christmas eve., when the Gleasons arrived. The family was assembled in the usual evening parlor, opening into the music room. Jane and Agnes had carried away the wrappings, leaving

the children with their parents. Ethel also remained, as was her wont, until dismissed, and stood leaning on the back of Mrs. Gleason's chair, her large, thoughtful eyes resting on Mrs. Vernon. The lady looked up, and met their glance; she half rose from her chair, her trembling hands clutching the arms, while her cold face bent forward, blanched to a deathly white, and directing every eye to Ethel, by her agitation, as she exclaimed in a shrill voice of sudden fear:

"Helen, who is that? who have you there?"

"Why, dear mother," Mrs. Gleason hastened to reply, "That is my little maid, Ethel; I hope she did not startle you," but almost instantly Mrs. Vernon had regained her composure, and said, with forced indifference:

"O, no, my dear, of course not; I believe I am a little nervous to-night, and her great eyes gave me an unpleasant feeling for a moment."

"I shall not need you any longer to-night, Ethel," said Helen kindly, while her eyes sought her husband's with an intelligent glance. The girl's offending eyes were bent upon the floor, in painful confusion, but her mistress' voice reassured her.

"Where shall I go, if you please?"

"Mother," said Mrs. Gleason, "I like to have Ethel near me, can she occupy the chamber next beyond mine, in the corner?"

"Certainly, dear," and Mrs. Vernon rang the bell near her hand.

"You may eat your supper, and go to bed, for I know you are tired," whispered Mrs. Gleason.

"But won't you want me?"

"Not to-night." Ethel gave her kind mistress a grateful look, and followed the footman who answered the bell, to a cosy room, once occupied by her mother. He waited until she bathed her face, and smoothed her hair, then conducted her to the supper-room with as much respect as he would have paid to her mistress. No farther remark was made relating to Ethel, and Mrs. Gleason was puzzled to account for her mother's marked emotion, unless, like herself, she had noticed a resemblance to Percy. Ah! she never dreamed the unhappy woman fancied the soul of the lost Gertrude was watching her from those shadowy gray eyes.

"Where is Guy?" asked Helen, when seated at the supper-table. She missed her young favorite from the board.

"The foolish boy insists on studying law, and has been drudging in Mr. Blake's office for three months."

"But why foolish?" demanded Mr. Gleason, "it is a most noble profession."

"My daughter feels as I do," answered Mrs. Vernon, with cold stateliness, "a young gentleman with Guy's expectation needs no profession."

"And I," returned Mr. Vernon, "glory in the spirit of our noble boy! He refuses to feed on his mother's bounty, like a useless moth, but prepares to carve his way, should it become necessary."

"There is little fear of it ever becoming necessary," insisted Mrs. Casā. "Brother Percy's fortune is immense, and as heir to one half of it, my son could not be censured for living a life of ease, instead of plodding at a profession."

"Still something may occur," impressively replied Mr. Vernon. "Percy may marry yet, and have heirs himself." There was a slight, very slight tremor in his voice, as he uttered that name.

"Not very probable, after remaining single all these years," said Alice.

"Percy is by no means old," said Helen, "he is only thirty-six, and I have no doubt he will marry yet, perhaps bring a wife home with him."

"It is not worth our while to conjecture the movements of one who has for years, without apparent cause, estranged himself from home and friends; we may safely conclude, however, that some passion, perhaps unworthy, has changed our beloved Percy," there was a dash of bitterness in Mrs. Vernon's voice, as she uttered these words, and pausing a moment added, "we can only hope and yearn for his coming, in silence, and leave time to bring him to a sense of the wrong and wretchedness of his course."

The noise of an arrival here interrupted the conversation, and immediately, a young man, flushed and glowing from his ride in the keen December air, entered the supper-room.

"My dear son, this is a pleasure ; we did not expect you until to-morrow," said Mrs. Casā, rising to return the warm kiss he bent to press upon her lips. He was warmly welcomed by all present, and he returned their greeting with simple heartiness, then taking his accustomed seat at the table, beside his mother, soon drew the thoughts of those present from the unpleasant subject occupying them when he came in.

It was indeed Guy Casā, a little, though not much changed from the graceful, warm-hearted boy, who accompanied his mother's coach, on horseback, to the White Mountains, four years before ; and in one of his erratic flights from her side, fell in with Ethel, and saved her from drowning. He had by no means forgotten the circumstance, or his promises, as it would appear, and this was the way of it.

When he reached the village, where his mother had already arrived, he hastened to tell her his adventure, and beg her to rescue the helpless child. As may be supposed, from her haughty, indolent nature, Alice Casā declined to act in the matter.

"What do you think I can do with her, you foolish boy ? she is too young to be of any use to me."

"Why mother! you are so rich, I thought you might send her to school, until she is old enough to teach, or do something for herself."

"What an absurd idea. I cannot turn my house into a foundling hospital, even to please you, Guy, which I should do, if I received every little vagabond you took a fancy to bring me."

"But mother, this is not a vagabond, but a very beautiful child, who I am sure will repay you a hundred fold, some day, for befriending her."

"We will let the matter drop, if you please, Master Guy," replied Mrs. Casā decidedly.

Though by no means given to practice gentle charity herself, Mrs. Casā had often given Guy means to relieve want and suffering, as he chanced upon them, and she might have been urged to gratify his wishes in the present case, but he dwelt with so much enthusiasm on the beauty and intelligence of the pretty mountain child, that her pride took the alarm. Might not the child, who could so win upon the youth's attention now, grow to a lovely woman, and in spite of poverty and obscurity, win the heart of her boy hereafter? It was not probable, yet it might be possible; she had heard of parallel instances, and the possibility of such a thing decided her.

Guy saw it was useless to urge the subject; so he yielded the point at once, but he never gave up the

resolution then formed ; and all through his college course, the memory of those tiny, clinging arms, and pleading eyes, never faded, but served as a constant spur to his exertions. It was not ambition alone, to place his name among the scholars of his adopted country, or to gather about him heaps of shining gold, that incited him to toil early and late, and to outstrip all his competitors, and seize the highest prize awarded to merit. No, he dreamed of a future, when the poor and suffering should hail him a benefactor, and lowly worth, and toiling mind, should be recognized through his upholding hand. Was it a wonder, with these ennobling aspirations, and a blameless life, that he was beloved and honored? He had barely closed his collegiate career and prepared to enter upon the study of his chosen profession, when he was stricken with a malignant fever, and for weeks he hovered in the dim unreality between life and death. When he did recover, so as to rise from his bed, the glory of summer had departed, and the maples that sprinkled the lawn at "The Rocks," held up to his feeble gaze the herald of autumn, the leaf of gold or crimson. While he was yet convalescent only, he hurried away, on a mountain trip, he said, confiding his secret to no one. We need scarcely say, he came back deeply disappointed, but by no means inclined to give up as lost, the child whose memory had been so sweet. I will leave the telling of

what he did to trace the little girl, for another time, and go back to the supper-room.

Guy was sitting opposite the door that led into the hall, his auburn curls thrown carelessly back, his hazel eyes shining with mirth, as he bandied the repartee with Helen and Arthur, talked stocks with his grandfather, and scattered bits of news right and left, with comments of his own. It was while looking up to answer some of Helen's pleasantry, that Ethel passed along the hall, towards her room. The tones of his voice fell upon her ear, and she paused, spell-bound, to look upon his face. She needed no one to tell his name, she knew it well, and the musical ring of his voice, grown a little deeper, that was all, and the merry sparkle of his handsome eyes, so well remembered, and the remembrance so dear to her now. Ah, yes, it was her Prince, but her's no longer.

She could not move from the spot while he was speaking, and when he ceased, she could not bring herself to remove her eyes from his face; and it was not until some movement of the company towards a rise from the table, warned her that she might be seen and reproved, broke the spell, and Ethel, with a new and strange emotion in the throes of birth, fled to her chamber, and throwing herself into her old position, kneeling by the window, thought.

"Oh, he has forgotten me! he has forgotten me!"

she sighed bitterly, "he would have come for me else. Shall I speak with him?" She shrank back within herself, the instinct of womanly reserve taking the alarm. "O, no, no, not for the world! I will keep out of his way. He may not like to be reminded of his broken promise." With this determination, she crept into bed, feeling more unhappy than she had for many months before. So young, and all unconscious, Ethel was awakening to woman's destiny.

After supper, and when they had returned to the parlor, Guy led his mother to a seat, and took one beside her.

"I have some news to tell you, dear mother, if you will listen to me now, as I shall have no time in the morning."

"No time in the morning, Guy, what do you mean? surely, my son, you will not return until after Christmas?"

"Until after Christmas? of course he will not," interrupted Mrs. Vernon, "one would suppose he was a poor tutor, toiling for his daily bread, rather than the heir of Percy Vernon."

"I do not undervalue the gifts of fortune, dearest madam, but I pray many a year may come and go, before I am permitted to enjoy Uncle Percy's."

"So do I, boy! so do I, with all my heart!" said Mr. Vernon.

"Very true, Guy," answered Mrs. Vernon, without noticing her husband's remark, "but why not, in the meantime, enjoy your leisure, live like a gentleman's son that you are, travel, and live at your ease; you can certainly do that on the princely income my son has settled upon you. You can have no scruples about using that, understanding the matter as you do, for it is but a mite, compared with his immense fortune."

Guy did not answer immediately. He did not wish to offend the pride of those he loved, nor wound their affection, yet he must defend his position. He knew the course he had marked out was the right one for him, and he must pursue it with determination, and Guy Casā was not one to yield a conviction. Finally he said:

"I am not ungrateful for the generous portion my Uncle Percy has settled upon me, and called it a debt; but that which I most covet in this world, cannot come to me by gift. I must win it myself. My grandfather approves my determination, and I think you all will, by and by."

"O, I know! Guy!" cried Mrs. Casā impatiently, "your ambition is to dwell forever in a dingy office, studying musty law-books, and grow dry and snuffy, like Mr. Blake!" Guy laughed.

"Not exactly, mother, though the ability and learning of Mr. Blake, command my reverence."

sleep of exhaustion, did not awake until her mistress entered her room, dressed in street costume. The little maid sprang up in confusion.

"I have overslept! I am sorry! did you want me?"

"No, it is not late, and you was very tired. I was obliged to rise early, for I am going to New York, and Alice is going with me, so my child, you will have nothing to do, but rest and read, all day, and I will leave books for you in my room. You may run out as often as you like, but while in the house, you had better stay in my chamber or your own."

Ethel remembered the unkind remarks of Mrs. Vernon, the night before, and understood her friend's wish to save the repetition. After Mrs. Gleason had gone, Ethel dressed herself in a crimson dress of soft woolen stuff, and smoothed her rippling hair, which was now long enough to cluster in her neck, went down to breakfast, afterwards sat down with her book. She was fast making up for her lack of schooling, for she spent every moment of leisure studying, helped over difficulties by her true benefactress. The hours flew by, and midday came, still the girl read on, and it was not until called to luncheon, that she realized the day was half gone.

"You don't say Master Guy sails to-day for Europe?" questioned Jenny of the butler.

"Yes, Miss Jenny, he has, and that is the reason

they have all gone to York with him, except old madam."

"How long is he going to stay?"

"The Lord knows; gone off as young Master Percy did, to stay as long as he lives, may be."

"Gracious, Ethel! what is the matter!" and Agnes was just in time to catch the reeling girl in her arms, as she fell forward. A dash of cold water speedily restored her, for she had not really fainted, and she was soon seated at the table, and urged to eat. "There, take some tea," and Jenny passed her a fragrant cup. "You have not eaten enough to keep a mouse alive, since you came here. I don't wonder you are faint," went on the good-natured girl, entirely oblivious to the cause of the sudden spasm.

Ethel sipped some of the tea, and tried to eat of the dainty things offered her, but every mouthful seemed to choke her, and soon as possible, she escaped from the good-natured servants, and sped towards her room. Passing the open door of Mrs. Vernon's chamber, she heard that lady call:

"Abbie, is that you?"

Ethel hesitated. She did not know whether to answer or run along. She dreaded to see the lady again; it was one of those unaccountable repulsions, which we all have felt some time, but cannot account for. She disliked and feared the stately lady, and yet

seemed fascinated. The preëmptory command of "Come here!" decided her, and she entered, and stood in the presence of Mrs. Vernon. The lady regarded her intently, without speaking, unheeding the girl's painful embarrassment; then she asked:

"What is your name, girl?"

"Ethel."

"But you have another! Ethel what?"

"Ethel Lester."

"Where do your parents reside?" sharply.

"I have no parents."

"Ah!" and Mrs. Vernon caught her breath, a strange, uneasy feeling gaining ground in her mind, and her fear and dislike increasing, for as Ethel cast her eyes down, her resemblance to her father was unmistakable.

"How old are you?" was the next question.

"Fifteen in April next."

"O, my soul! can this be her child?" was the inward torturing thought, and then another pause.

"Well, why don't you tell me where you came from, when you came to Boston."

"Because you did not ask me, madam!"

Ethel did not mean to be pert, but to her fear of the stern old lady, her dislike was increasing, beside, something within her resented the arrogant tone addressed to her.

"Well then, you may tell me."

"I lived with my cousin in New Hampshire ; she considered me old enough to earn my own living, so I came to the city, and Mrs. Gleason was good enough to employ me."

Ethel had no wish to vex or mislead the lady, but she could not open her heart to her, and while she answered truthfully, as far as it went, she could not help misleading her, and Mrs. Vernon, though fretted at her want of success in drawing the child out, little cared to speculate on the cause, nor would have believed, perhaps, it was owing to the impression she made on the wretched young mother, many years before. She did mark, however, the correct language, and refined carriage of the girl, and felt more and more convinced that Gertrude's daughter stood before her. She remembered many things in her appearance afterwards, unthought of at the time of her departure, and as the young thing stood before her, in the crimson dress, slight and tall, she thought she could trace in every lineament, which the sunlight clearly revealed, a likeness to both parents.

How she longed to question her, until she drew every particular of her past, short life, but she had not the art nor courage, "for conscience makes cowards of us all," and she feared she might be understood by the clear-headed child. No, she would learn from Helen

by and by; her suspicions must be set at rest; but if she was right, then there was more work for her to do, for never! never! should a daughter of the hated Gertrude inherit her son's name.

She sent Ethel from her presence, and musing on the past, the hours went by, until the short twilight closed in the cold December day, and her maid entered with lights.



CHAPTER XI.

OLD, OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

"A dark, proud man he was, whose half-blown youth
Had shed its blossoms even in opening,
Leaving a few that with more winning ruth
Trembling around grave manhood's stem might cling,
More sad than cheery, making, in good sooth,
Like the fringed gentian, a late autumn spring;—
A twilight nature, braided light and gloom,
A youth half-smiling by an open tomb."—LOWELL.



YOU need not bring lights quite yet. Stay though," she added, "they have come, and I will go down to the parlor." The sound of a sleigh was distinctly heard on the frozen drive, and she had scarcely seated herself, with Abbie's help, when a strange voice, speaking grave and slow, fell upon her ear. Something in its mellow cadence startled her, and the blood from her head leaped to her heart, and seemed to stop there, while she clung to her chair to keep herself from falling, looking eagerly towards the door all the while. A tall form darkened it, wrapped in a furred overcoat, and in spite of the bronzed face and heavy black beard that fell upon his breast, it needed no second glance to assure the mother's heart, who stood in her presence.

"Percy! O my son!" Trembling in every limb,

the feeble arms extended, and the next instant the proud woman lay sobbing and helpless as a child on the heart whose happiness she had so wickedly wrecked.

"Dearest mother, you are kind to give your wanderer so warm a welcome." He bent his head, and laid his cheek against her's, as he folded her in his arms, but he did not kiss her, and the omission stung her cruelly.

"Unkind, unkind, did you think a mother's heart could change? I have thought of your long wanderings with grief, and sometimes resentment at your silence, but you are here, and I can only rejoice at your coming, and wait patiently for you to explain your strange conduct."

"Forgive me, mother, and if you can, receive me again to your home and love, but I must ask you still to respect my silence as to the past; believe me, my reasons were sufficient, but I shall never disclose them."

"Be it so, anything! anything so you remain with us."

Percy led his mother to her seat, and proceeded to divest himself of his heavy overcoat, asking at the same time:

"Where is my father and Alice? I expected to find all at home to-night."

"So they will be, soon, also Helen and her husband and children, all the family except Guy."

"Where is he?"

Mrs. Vernon explained, and added:

"Strange ambition for one so young, and with his expectations."

"I am glad to hear so good a report of Guy; glad to think he will occupy a position, be other than a cypher in the world. With such aspirations, his will not be a wasted life, let fate deal ever so hardly with him."

"She is not forgotten, he mourns her still," was the mother's inward comment, and she noticed too, he had not smiled once since he came in, but she did not dare even to seem conscious of anything unusual in his mien, for it appeared to the guilty woman those deep, slow-moving eyes must discover the machiavelian plot that destroyed his happiness. It was almost a relief when the musical clang of bells announced the arrival of the family. It was a joyous meeting, worthy a Christmas eve. Percy was instantly recognized; his image had been too dearly cherished, to have even the disguise of time and travel obscure it.

"My boy! my boy, is it you at last?" The cheery voice faltered as their hands clasped; there was no cloud on the father's joy at meeting, or hesitation in his fervent, "Thank God that I meet you again!"

Mrs. Casā clung to him with tear-streaming eyes, tears of pure joy, for of all earth, Alice loved her princely brother, almost better than herself, and many a sad hour she had spent thinking of him, and his apparent neglect of his friends. Percy would not have recognized his sister Helen, but her arms were around his neck, and her lips raining kisses on his face, and murmuring, brother, darling brother, assured him it was none other than his precious sister. After the nearer and dearer greetings, Arthur was presented, and the children noticed with a kind caress; then supper was announced, and leaning on her son's arm, Mrs. Vernon led the way.

"Percy must have the seat of honor, beside me, to-night."

"Ah, mother! if you make a stranger of me, I shall run away, again."

"O no, brother! only stay with us, and you may be anything or do anything you like."

"See that you do not retract your words, little sister, for I am but a poor companion, generally."

They did not find him so that evening at least, which was consumed in questions and answers about old friends and acquaintances, and about places and people he had seen. The next day, being Christmas, brought the usual number of invited guests, for the Vernons kept up the old-time custom of keeping

Christmas holidays. Mrs. Verson saw but little of her son, except in the presence of others. Indeed, she did not seek to, although she was restless unless he was present, and her eyes were constantly seeking his face, and even he noticed the peculiarity of her gaze, and wondered slightly, for it did not seem so much the affectionate gaze of a mother, as it did of curiosity or fear, even. Sometimes he fancied, almost, that she understood his secret, and pitied him, but put the thought aside, as impossible, but whatever the reason, there had crept between mother and son a shadow that kept them apart, to him mysterious, to her, the chill of the grave was upon it, and the lineaments those of the heart-broken Gertrude.

Percy mingled with the company assembled, and appeared to wish to please his friends by forgetting his haunting sorrows, but if he did try, he failed. Courteous and entertaining he certainly was, yet no more the genial, fascinating Percy of old, and save that they knew it was he, it would be difficult to identify this dark, unsmiling man, with a far-off look in his deep eyes, as the merry-eyed, witty Percy they remembered fifteen years before.

When the holidays were over and the company departed, and the house settled back to its usual quiet, Percy withdrew more and more to himself, weary with playing a part; and the family — after

trying in vain to draw him into general society — tacitly agreed to let him alone. At first he avoided the spot where all those sweet, secret meetings with his wife of one blissful month had taken place, but by and by, as though drawn by some invisible hand, he found himself there. The ground was snow-covered, and the trees leafless, but it had been their trysting place in winter as well as summer, and no doubt, if spirits are permitted to linger in places endeared to them in earth-life, the spirit of poor, wronged Gertrude hovered near her idolized husband, and perhaps — who shall scout the thought — it was her influence that led the wearied man from his wanderings, back to his native land — back to his home where their short union had been so sweet, that he might find and recognize her daughter — their daughter — restore her to her rightful heritage, and rescue the mother's name from reproach, and in doing this, bring him back to a life of usefulness and comparative peace.

I do not propose to discuss the matter here, but when we see how strangely events are brought about, and as we gather up the thread of circumstance, we find it connected, link by link, from one part of the world to another; how can we doubt that the God of all nature uses these influences to work out his will — influences of which we are unconscious. To me it seems presumption to doubt, though to our narrowed

vision — cloyed and blinded by earth — the wisdom may not appear.”

Again and again, would Mrs. Vernon watch, from her chamber window, her son threading the narrow beaten path across the park, and far, far as the eye could reach, she could discern the tall form slowly, with bowed head, pacing back and forth, in the skeleton grove, or leaning against the stile, unheeding the keen air, or glittering sun, falling snow, or drizzling fog; all weathers were alike to him, and often the dark of the soon-coming winter evening found him there, and when he did return to the house, he usually went direct to his room, and perhaps spent half the night walking the floor.

All this was deeply wearing on his mother — though of course he knew it not. She felt that a crisis was drawing near, though when or how the blow would fall she could not tell. She wanted to question Helen about Ethel, to have her kept close in the chambers, and not be allowed in the Park, nor in fact, wherever the children went; but how explain this request? She would not explain — why should she, in fact she would request her sent away, anything to keep Percy from meeting her; he had not apparently noticed her as yet, but he might any day, and something must be done, but still she could not decide how to move first. So she waited in torture and silence for the end that was surely drawing near.

The reason she hesitated to question Helen was, she feared a word inadvertently spoken might awaken suspicion in her daughter's mind of the truth, forgetting it would be impossible without the key she herself held. For the same reason she feared to have Percy see the child; he might recognize the likeness to his wife, investigate her history, so learn the truth beyond a doubt, though she must have been aware of the necessity as incitation to such a recognition, the knowledge of the likelihood of having a child in existence. Thus fearful and irresolute, had this unscrupulous, self-reliant woman grown.

As for Ethel, she was careful not to venture into the presence of Mrs. Vernon, unless obliged to, and Mrs. Gleason intuitively understanding the dislike to her little maid, was particular to keep her from her mother's presence as much as possible. Altogether, Ethel was very well content. Her duties were light, her mistress more than kind. She taught her all the mysteries of needle-work, selecting with the care of an elder sister, books for her to read, and keeping her in her own society as much as possible, as she had done at home; and Ethel, quick to learn, grew every day more like a younger sister, rather than a dependent.

It is true Percy had never noticed her, but she had him, and always listened breathless to catch the sound of his voice, which was low and serious, and thrilled

her strangely. How she longed to have him speak to her—she knew not why, she never asked herself why—but the wish grew daily stronger, until it was her constant thought.

“O, if he would only speak to me, or lay his hand upon my head as sometimes he does on Alice’s. If I could but kiss his hand; I wonder why he always looks so sad. Perhaps some one he loved has died, I wish I dared to tell him how sorry I am for him. I should not be a bit afraid of him; if he would only speak to me,” and thus she mused—never dreaming it was nature claiming her right to comfort a sorrowing father. She never placed herself where he would be sure to observe her, much as she wished to be noticed, but she never heard his step, slow and quiet, coming up the stairs, or crossing the hall, that she did not, if unobserved, spring to catch but a glimpse of him, or the sound of his voice, and listen and look until she could see nor hear more.

Ethel possessed in an eminent degree the gift of song, and as the fetters of grief and fear were loosened, her freed spirit often burst forth in wild, sweet strains that startled her listeners with wonder and delight. She was unconscious of the charm, and only sang to please the children, or as a bird sings because she must, and it relieved her heart, whether sad or gay.

One Sabbath evening the family were assembled in the parlor, after the Vesper service which, as usual, Ethel attended with the rest. The anthem that closed the service was more than usually grand and impressive, and Mrs. Gleason was remarking upon it, when from the music-room — where Ethel was sitting with Alice and Maud — her rare voice, low at first and faltering, but gaining confidence as she went on, rose higher and purer, and poured forth, almost entirely correct, note after note, the Holy Song.

Every one present listened with mute and wondering surprise, but Mrs. Vernon with absolute terror, as grasping the arms of her chair, she leaned forward, her whole form fearfully agitated. Seeing Percy turn from the window where he had been looking into the gathering twilight, his face blanched and inquiring, she so far conquered her fear as to hide it under the guise of anger, and turning to her daughter, said :

“I wonder at you, Helen ! permitting your servants to take such liberties !”

“I will speak to her, mother, I am sure she did not think of offending ; she is singing to please the children,” and Mrs. Gleason arose and went out, closing the door behind her.

“Who was that singing ?” asked Percy, nothing but his white face betraying how deeply the music stirred him, and fixing his eyes on his mother.

She could not answer, with his eyes upon her, but Mrs. Casā replied unconcernedly :

"O, it was one of Helen's servants, she sings very well, but sister goes in raptures about her. Talks of having her voice cultivated, and the like nonsense. She spoils all her servants with indulgence ; it is shameful to do so ! it lifts the creatures so far above their station, that they forget themselves, and their places."

"What matter, sister," said Percy, taking a seat and apparently forgetting the song and the singer, "I should rather think it a cause for rejoicing than otherwise, to be able by such simple acts to do a little towards elevating the human race." Alice stared at him blankly.

"But surely, Percy, you would not have us treat our servants as our equals, would you?"

"If they are our equals, yes, and it cannot harm a man's dignity to be courteous to those who serve him."

"True," returned Alice, a little impatiently, "but we were speaking of equality. Do you consider your valet your equal?"

"Yes, in many things. In fidelity, honesty, and common sense —"

"Pshaw ! you know what I mean, mentally, socially, and in polite culture?"

"Well, certainly not exactly. Mentally he may be,

socially, he lacks the accident of money, that gave me my position at birth, and holds me there, not any merit of my own; he is educated only by observation in the manners of polite society, though he has more true refinement than the majority, as well as solid attainments."

"Why, Percy, are you a defender of the absurd cry of equality and all that nonsense, that claims all men to be equal without reference to birth; do you believe the low-born, uncultured man the equal of him who has descended from generations of intellectual giants, and has received himself the culture, the natural sequence of learning, and superior social influences?"

"No, I do not, but I believe the superiority to be ingenerate in the man, not inherent in his position."

"But don't you rank high in the perfecting of manhood, culture, and the refining associations with scholarly men?"

"Certainly, mother, the soul without culture is like a block of unhewn marble, the glorious possibilities are all within itself, but undiscovered until the hand of the skilled workman brings to light its beauties."

"That brings us back to the first question, Are all persons equal? I hold that some are born to be served, others to serve; some to rule, others to be ruled; there are different degrees of persons as well as places, and each should be treated according to his degree."

"I think Alice is right," said Mr. Vernon, "the limbs are just as important in a perfect organization as brains or body, and while they are quite as important, they are different, different in structure, though composed of the same material, consequently must be treated differently."

"If we fulfilled aright the design of our being, we should all serve in some capacity," replied Percy; "some mentally, some morally, some spiritually, others again, physically. It is true, all cannot rule, yet it is also true, that those who are governed, should have a voice in making the laws invested in their rulers, and it is a most unhappy fact that all rulers are not worthy of their high position. I fancy sometimes that mother nature, bewildered with her handiwork, mixes up things in her laboratory, and the results are, many rare, sweet souls are brought forth in poverty and obscurity, and sometimes remain there, never to be known beyond the small circle who may love and appreciate them, or, harder still, dwell misunderstood always; while the accident of birth, or money, or perhaps a powerful positive will, places a coarse-fibered common man at the head of the State, and holds him there, a reproach to the country which produced him. We read it in the annals of all ages, and countries. How few, comparatively, the kings or governors who possessed the true kingly attributes. It is a sad state the world

is in, when we have to seek for a ruler ; but the finding of a ruler, who rules by the divine right of his sincerity, clear-seeing, and a great deep heart full of brotherly love, pitiful for mankind, would be the healing the country needs, and seeks."

"But my son, many such men have lived and ruled ; our country at her dawning especially, saw many such. Did there ever live a more kingly soul than Jefferson ? The gentlest man, of unvarying courtesy, and a mind grand and deep as the finite mind of man can be."

"Very true, father, and I could name many more, men not born in the purple, whose crown of honorable manhood would outdazzel the jewelled diadem. Our country's noblest men were of this stamp."

"Not all, Percy ! I have heard that blood-royal ran in the veins of George Washington."

"It may be, mother," returned Percy, with perfect gravity — he understood her weakness, "he at least proved himself right royal in the cause he advocated, and wore the honors of chief magistrate with true dignity. Were there more such men now, as then swayed the councils, I might gratify my father, by engaging in politics."

"Ah, Percy," returned Mr. Vernon, wistfully, "it would be a gratification, the realization of my most ambitious desires."

Percy shook his head. "I should not succeed. I

am not fashioned for the times, I have not the genius to rouse this false, artificial time, this time of semblances, where there is nothing real in it except the crowding and striving for the highest place, and the sordid scramble for its spoils. An earnest man must wait patiently until all this is ended, before he can hope to be heard, long generations of confused agitations possibly. No, I should fail."

"My son, an honest man endeavoring with a straightforward, singleness of purpose to serve his country, never fails. You would not work for profit, you are indifferent to praise or blame, but your voice might have weight in this crisis of your country's peril, and if you influenced only a few to do their duty faithfully, it would be more satisfactory than fame."

It was not the first time by many that the same subject had been touched upon by father and son, since the latter's return home, but always with the same result. Mr. Vernon — himself a worker — felt grieved at the persistent inactivity of Percy. He knew him to possess talents, and felt it wrong, to let them run to waste, as well as wrong to let his vast wealth accumulate year by year in idleness, when a judicious use of it would be so beneficial to his kind. He did not know of the many who had been raised from despairing poverty to comparative plenty! and placed in a fair way to competence, by the generous aid of this

solitary man, or the toiling scholar, whom a timely bounty had saved from years of dragging labor; of the many, many that in various ways he had assisted, made more comfortable, consequently morally better; so when at his last remark, Percy only shook his head again, and replied: "Not yet, father, not yet!" he could only sigh, and turn to caress the little hand laid on his shoulder. It was Helen, who had quietly returned, and was listening to the grave discussion raised by the careless remark of Alice.

Said Mrs. Vernon, returning to the point of departure: "I do not see what emperors and politics have to do with over-indulgence to servants. I think, with Alice, that it is mistaken kindness to make those born in humble life, our companions and equals, as for instance, Helen persists in doing. It only renders them discontented with their real position, and presuming to their superiors."

"O, mother dear! Ethel is not presuming, and is so grateful for the help I give her, and then, she is so bright and intelligent, it is a pleasure to teach her!"

"Well, I only hope you will not regret to the end of life, the trouble you make yourself for her."

Helen had always observed the unaccountable dislike her mother cherished for the little girl, but there was peculiar bitterness in her last remark, and as was her custom on all occasions, she sought the eyes of her

son. She found his resting upon her with a look that startled her with a new fear. Helen hastened to change the subject, but all felt the presence of the shadow, and Percy, abashed at the unholy thought that had stealthily crept into his mind, and at his mother's words assumed shape, though undefined, and shadowy, arose and went to the window from whence the singing had drawn him, and very soon retired. This fearful phantom had mocked him more than once since his return home, and as often he had banished it, put it away, but it gradually gained ground, in spite of filial love. Whence it originated he knew not, but the cruel conviction that his mother was in some way cognizant of his unfortunate marriage, and so assisted, perhaps drove his wife to desert him, had more than once darkened his mind, hence his increasing gloom and constraint in his mother's presence.



CHAPTER XII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"Then came dear Love and shared with me his crust,
And half my sorrow's burden took." — LOWELL.



THE day following the sabbath just noticed, brought a party from the city to spend a few days. A Mrs. Weston, and her daughter of fifteen. She was as lovely as a sunbeam, with all the airs and graces of a spoilt child and heiress. It had been a favorite theme of Mrs. Casā and her friend, Nannie Weston, that in coming years, Miss Laura and Master Guy should make a match, "but we must not hint our wishes, for you know young people are sometimes so obstinate, they would not follow their own inclinations, did they suppose we desired them to." Therefore, nothing was ever said, but twice or thrice a year, the families exchanged visits, and thus Guy and Laura were thrown together at intervals, and certainly, quite a liking had grown up between them. Strange as it may seem, from the very first of her meeting with Ethel, Miss Laura conceived a strong dislike to her, and did not disguise it. We can only impute it to an alarmed selfishness, that would monopolize all attention

and affection; and to see this poor girl so beloved by the children, so kindly treated by the mother, and even the servants treating her with a delicate consideration, the more valuable because real, made her wonder, but to hear them praise her beauty and sweetness, made her envious and spleeny. The consequence was, the spoilt little lady lost no opportunity of venting her ill-nature on Ethel, who, however, paid no heed, except by withdrawing from places, whenever practicable, where she was likely to meet Miss Laura. This she could not always do, for she was necessarily with the children much of the time, and the haughty little miss, having no companion of her own age, made one of Alice, though much younger than herself, and consequently Ethel was obliged to bear with her petty malice, and often be blamed by the elders, when she was blameless. She usually received it without protest, for she instinctively knew her mistress believed in her, and that was sufficient. However, the crisis of her fate was nearer at hand than she knew.

One morning while the ladies were yet in the breakfast-room chatting, a sharp cry startled them, and then the sound of running feet across the marble-paved vestibule, through the hall, and Laura dashed open the door, exclaiming, as she held up a glittering jewel, —

“See mother! see what a splendid chain and cross for a servant to wear, don’t you believe she stole it?”

"I did not! I did not! you wicked, bad girl!" cried Ethel, striving to reach the gem. "It is mine, and I will have it!"

"Let me see," said Mrs. Casā, who was nearest, receiving it, and holding it up to the light, with an exclamation of surprise. "Of course she stole it!"

"I did not! I did not! I would not steal sooner than yourself," and all the old, evil temper, so long subdued and chastened by kind treatment, flashed into her splendid eyes. She made a dash forward, and again assayed to snatch the jewel. Mrs. Casā held it above her reach, but received on her arm a long, deep scratch, accidentally inflicted by the nail of the maddened girl.

"There, you ugly creature! see what you have done!" cried Mrs. Casā, as the blood followed the mark, and with the words, she gave Ethel a blow that left its print on her cheek.

"Sister!"

The whole scene had passed so rapidly, that Helen had had no opportunity to interfere. She was grieved and shocked at Ethel's burst of temper, but she was indignant at her sister also.

"Ethel, what does this mean?" she asked in a grave voice.

"It is plain what it means," replied Alice, haughtily. "She has evidently been stealing, and is afraid of detection; here is truth and gentleness for you."

Ethel was about to reply passionately, when a look from Helen checked her, and though her breast heaved, and her hands were clenched, she did not speak.

"Let me see it, Alice," and Mrs. Vernon reached out a hand, shaking as with palsy. From the moment her eye fell on the jewel, she had leaned back in her chair, cowering in her guilt. Her emotions were unobserved in the scene transpiring, and in this perilous moment, she decided what course to pursue. It is needless to say she recognized the jewel as the one once worn by Gertrude, and was fearful others might do the same. As she gathered the chain in her trembling hand, she said :

"What did you say, girl? you must have taken this from my jewel-box, where it has lain for years undisturbed."

"O, Mrs. Vernon, how can you say so, you know better, you know it is not yours!" Ethel again burst out, though with less vehemence than at first. "It was my mother's! my poor, dead mother's! I have only that and her ring; give it to me, O, do give it to me!"

Even as she claimed the cross as her own, Mrs. Vernon shrank back, a gray, stony look creeping into her face, and her hand concealing the gems. Ethel was conscious of another presence, yet she was too much excited to heed it, until, as she uttered the last word, she felt a hand laid on her head, only for an

instant, however, and Percy advanced to his mother's side.

"Let me see it, mother."

The words were simple, and his voice calm, wofully calm, and sounded on the heart of the guilt-sick woman like a denunciation. She did not reply, nor remove her hand from the proof, this silent witness of Ethel's birthright, nor her eyes from her son; and Alice, misunderstanding her mother, thought her offended that Percy should presume to interfere in domestic matters, said:

"Brother Percy, why do you trouble mother? let us women settle this unpleasant affair ourselves."

He did not reply to the speaker, but to his mother he again urged:

"Let me look at the trinket, mother, I think I have seen it before."

She could not resist the gentle force he used to unclasp the hands that lay in her lap, and as he raised the slender chain on his finger, the cross of rubies hung sparkling in the sunlight. With the same mechanical calmness that had marked his manner throughout, Percy pressed his thumb on the large centre ruby; it moved upward, revealing a cavity, on which his eyes were fixed, but not a tremor betrayed the wild tumult that raged within. Of course, those present were amazed, and came eagerly forward to examine what a

glimpse disclosed to be a tiny miniature. But he gathered the trinket into his hand, saying gently to Helen, "all in good time," then to his mother, —

"How long have you had this, mother?"

It would never do to falter now, never! never! surely her word would be taken before this beggar's. With these decisive thoughts coming electrically, she recovered her usual haughty calm, so to her son's question she answered unhesitatingly:

"For years, as I said before. It was left with me, and has lain undisturbed, until that girl must have taken it."

"O, Mrs. Vernon, I brought this with me, when I came to Mrs. Gleason," Ethel replied, but gently now, for she knew she had more than one friend present, and they would see her righted, and the touch of that hand had been like a benediction.

"Where did you keep it, Ethel? I never saw it."

"In a little silk bag, fastened around my neck by a black silk cord."

"A very probable story!" sneered Mrs. Casā, while Mrs. Weston murmured, — "how brazen," but Mrs. Gleason replied kindly, as ever:

"Yes, I have noticed the cord; have you it and the bag?"

"Here they are; Miss Laura snatched the cord, and broke it, and then tore open the silk to get at the chain."

"Surely, mother dear, it must be one like yours, and not the same."

Percy was all this time intently regarding Ethel, and when she held up the cord, he caught the gleam of something bright in her hand.

"You have something more, child, let me see it."

"It was my mother's," answered Ethel, giving a plain circle of gold. He took it, looked at the four initials wreathed together on the inner side. Would nothing move him? nor break the awful calm that invested him? not even the ring he put upon the finger of his lost wife at their midnight marriage, nor the eyes of his child looking into his?

"Let me look at the cross, Percy," and Helen held out her hand. He placed the gems within it; she examined the ornament minutely. "Why mother! why Percy! this is like the cross that our Gertrude used to wear, and yes, it is the same chain I gave her, for there is my name on the clasp, and the hair running through it"—she paused abruptly; a perception of the truth was creeping into the loving blue eyes resting on her brother.

"It was poor Gertrude's," he replied, his eyes still on Ethel, and then to her:

"How old are you, dear child?" his hand was again laid on her head, and oh, there was such ineffable tenderness in his voice and touch.

"Fifteen in April, sir." She could not raise her eyes, and her heart gave one wild leap, as the conviction flashed upon her,—surely, surely, this caressing hand she had felt in dreams, and none but a father could call her "dear child," in tones like these.

"How long has your mother been dead?" still the caressing touch on her hair, the unmoved eyes on her face.

"There is no date, only the inscription; 'Gertrude, aged 18.'" Ah! how pitiful!

"Where is this grave, my child?"

"In Lincoln, New Hampshire."

"I want you to go with me there, will you?"

"Yes sir."

"Helen, will you see that she is got ready to go with me?"

"Certainly, Percy, when? and what does all this mean?" and the others present looked the questions they dared not ask.

"Do not question me, sweet sister; when I have fathomed a most unnatural and obscure matter, as I believe I am about to do, I will tell you the mystery of my long exile. Make Ethel ready at once to go with me!" Mrs. Gleason walked away, followed by the happy girl.

"At once!" Mrs. Vernon almost whispered, so faint her voice, "think Percy! think what you are about to do!"

"Mother!" there was inflexible determination in his tone. "Mother! I am about to clear away the uncertainty that for the first time has given me a clue which I could grasp. If I have wronged the living, the dead shall be righted. Perhaps" — and he bent his gaze with wistful questioning, upon her own — "perhaps you can aid me, if you will."

"Never! never! and my malediction upon those who seek to disinter the past!"

Trembling with passion and terror, she leaned back in her chair. Percy returned her look for one brief moment, with sorrowful sternness, then left the room, the dim phantom growing more distinct. He was sure, now, his mother could tell him all he wished to know, if she would, and perhaps, — Ah! the terrible suspicion — she from the first to last, had been the cause!

"In Heaven's name! tell me what all this strange talk, and Percy's strange conduct means," exclaimed Alice, as she was left alone with the two ladies. Mrs. Vernon attempted to rise, but tottered, and sank back in her seat.

"Ask me no questions, daughter, but help me to my room, for never again in life shall my eyes rest on that ungrateful, unnatural boy, if he persists in bringing to light his shame."

Alice, frightened at the hollow, broken accents and ashen face, hastened to obey, assisted by her friend,

both in silence. Mrs. Vernon kept her word ; though she lived many years, she and Percy never met again.

As we have seen, a faint gleam of the truth dawned upon the mind of Helen, and she made ready the young girl for her journey, seeing that everything was fitting, and when all was arranged, the becoming cap of costly fur, belonging to Alice, with its collar and muff to match, were laid ready to put on, seeing which, Ethel drew back. "No, I would rather wear my own," but Mrs. Gleason hastened to reassure her.

"You are going with Mr. Vernon, dear, and you must dress as becomes his companion." She did not say daughter, though as she turned the girl around to arrange the cap, she thought, "how like, how like ! yes, it must be so !"

Leading the way to the now deserted breakfast-room, she found her brother waiting, and the horses stamping impatiently at the door.

"We shall get the mid-day train," he said, and then taking the hands of his new-found, but unclaimed treasure, looked long and tenderly in her face, as though trying to trace each beloved and remembered feature, and then turned his eyes to his sister. She read his mute question.

"I think I can understand, dearest brother, but I can wait for all that seems mysterious, and may God bless and aid in your search."

He wrung her hand, though, as always, he did not return her kiss; then lifting Ethel to a seat, they were soon whirling along to the station; here, taking the train for New York, they arrived in an hour. They were obliged to remain in the city until evening, in order to take the night boat across the sound. Percy said but little to his companion during their ride to the city, though the searching glance was constantly on her face, and thoughtful care provided for her comfort. But on arriving in New York, he went directly to his favorite hotel, and after dinner, returned to their private parlor, and taking a seat near the fair girl, said:

"Now, my child, I want you to relate to me everything you know of yourself and your poor, young mother. Everything you have ever heard or learned concerning her."

"I will, sir, but it is very little I can tell you about my mother, for no one seemed to know anything about her, except Mrs. Wetherbee, and she would never tell me anything; only once, when I asked her, she said there was nothing to tell to her credit, or mine, and that I should know soon enough. I can bring you to her, and perhaps she will give you the casket of letters that grandmother left, to be given me, when I should have completed my eighteenth year."

With simple and fitting language, she related her own childish history, always passing over in silence,

her meeting and parting with Guy. Leaning back in his chair, watching every change in her ingenuous countenance, noting every cadence in her sweet, young voice, the father listened, drawing deep from this new-found affection, which he, wrapped in the one great gloom that darkened all else, had never dared hope there was in store for him.

"Was it wrong to take the ring and cross, when I knew they were mine?" Ethel asked, when she had concluded her story.

"We will not discuss the right or wrong, my child, we accept the fact that you are an instrument in the hands of a power greater than yourself; we all are, when we are needed to do a work, and pray Heaven yours may be the holy work of rescuing the memory of your mother from unjust reproach."

Their journey was speedy and pleasant, and on the afternoon of the second day, they arrived in Lincoln, and stopped at the Inn. Ethel was instantly recognized, though no longer the pale, saddened, poorly-clad child, but blooming and fair as became her years, and her elegant and becoming costume rendered the fact more apparent, that she was a true daughter of her father's house.

Immediately after supper, Ethel went to her bedroom, and Percy engaged the services of a countryman, who had his own team at the village, to drive him to

Cedar Farm. Ben was one of those droll, seemingly simple fellows, possessing a deal of blundering wit, and a vast amount of impudence, who are privileged to say and do that, which would receive a summary check in another kind of person, therefore, almost as soon as starting, he commenced to "pump," to speak in his own expressive nomenclature. Mr. Vernon understood his man, and led him on, thinking aright, that his garrulity might throw light on the subject so near his heart; and while many a sentence made his proud, tender soul bleed, he listened with quiet attention, as though it was an episode of country life, in which he had no especial interest. The man ran on,—

"I knowed the little gal, as soon as I sot eyes on her, though she don't look much like the poor, over-worked creeter she was at Miss Wetherbee's, and law bless you, I remember her mother as well as if it was yesterday, though it must be more than fifteen year, that she came here. It was in November, and it rained and blowed 'bout as hard as I ever see it. It was an orful storm. She came up in the stage all alone, and wanted to be carried to Mrs. Adams'. She would not hear to stopping all night, anyway, so Miss Martin, that's the landlady back there, says she to me, 'Ben, you'd better take her with you, as you go right by there, for she says she must walk, if no one will carry her, I believe the creeter is crazy.' And she did seem

so, sir, indeed she did. She was purty too, purty as a pictur, for all she was white as milk, and her great eyes looked as though she never shed a tear, so bright and wild they looked. Well, poor thing, she never went out again, but just staid right there, and pined and pined, and when her little baby was only two or three months old, the girl-mother died, for she was nothing but a girl in years."

"Did you say nothing was known about her, previous to her coming here?"

"Nothing to speak of, sir. It is certain she was a poor unfortunate, and died of a broken heart, but whatever old lady Adams knew, she kept to herself. Howsomever, it is said her seducer, or what you may call him, was present at her funeral."

"What?" and the listener sat bolt upright instantly.

"Why, I say the day she was buried, a stranger came to the tavern, and inquired if there was a young lady in town by the name of Gertrude, I forgot the other name he mentioned, and when the landlady told him she was to be buried that day, he seemed like one shot. He tuck all of a tremble, and sot right down in a chair, and turned almost white, for you see, sir, he was nearly as black as an injun; pretty soon he called for brandy, and poured out a full glass tumbler, and drank the whole at once, and then another. After a while, he went up to the meeting-house, and looked at

the corpse, but he did not speak to any one, and he went away the same night. He must have been orful rich, for he gave me a handful of gold pieces, to carry him to the next village, and amongst them I found this, so I had a pin put to it, and have wore it in my neck-ercher ever since." Ben lifted his shaggy beard, and displayed what was once a sleeve button, but now served as the head of a long pin for fastening the scarf around his brawny neck. Percy was fearfully moved.

"Let me look at it, my man!"

Ben took it out, and placed it in the outstretched hand. It was a single diamond of great value, richly set in chased gold, and gleamed in his hand like a ray of condensed light. The back was plain gold, with a simple name engraved; on this, the searcher's eyes were fixed. It was "Casā." O, the doubts! conjectures! and fears that a glimmer of understanding chased through his brain. Could it be, that he whom he had considered almost a demigod, had done this? If so, what could have been his purpose, and how accomplished? Not alone and unaided, could he have brought it about. His mother? Like a flash, as by clairvoyance, the truth came to him. Meanwhile Ben was waiting. Said Mr. Vernon at length:

"Would you like to part with this jewel?"

"I do not care much to let it go, still for a consideration —"

“For how much will you part with it?”

Ben would have sold the gem long before, had he met with a purchaser, and just now he was in great need of a certain sum of money, to take up the last mortgage on his farm. Would the gentleman beside him give what the gem was worth? He instinctively felt that he would be honorable, and the safest way would be to trust him.

“I don't know the worth of it, sir; how much will you give me?”

The gentleman named a sum much larger than Ben had hoped to get, so he took it readily. Mr. Vernon put the pin into his pocket-book, paying Ben the full value for it. They had now reached Cedar Farm, and the countryman stopped at the entrance of the lane, that led to the house.

“Would you like me to wait for you, or do you stay here all night? if so, I will go right along; I live beyond here a mile or so.”

“If you would like the job, I am going back to the village to-night.”

“All right, old Ben can stand it.” And he turned his horse's head towards the house.



CHAPTER XIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

"After the world's soft bed,
Its rich and dainty fare,
Like down, seemed Love's coarse pillow to my head."

—LOWELL.



KNOCK brought Jacob Wetherbee to the door, unchanged, save a little more sullen in expression and little thinner in form, for the disappearance of Ethel had worn on his not bad nature constantly, and from that day to the present, he had not given up all hope or search.

"Mr. Wetherbee?" interrogated the stranger.

"Yes sir, walk in," and his slow blood gave a sudden start as he recognized his neighbor, and giving him good day, led the way to the clean, roomy kitchen. Mr. Vernon entered upon the business that brought him, at once, and stated it in a clear, concise manner.

"I understand, Mr. Wetherbee, that fifteen years ago last November, a young lady came to this house, and after the birth of a daughter, she sickened and died. I would like to learn all the circumstances relating to her unhappy history, and receive the letters left by her, and whatever mementos there may be in ex-

istence; also, what you may have to say about the child, if you will oblige me."

Poor Jacob sank into a chair, his heavy lower jaw dropping in dismay. Here was a demand for his neglected talent, with a vengeance; but before he could find words to reply, the inner door was flung open, and Lucinda, sharp and bristling, framed herself within it. Jacob arose, "My wife," he said, with much misgiving, and Percy, with the perfect breeding that recognizes a woman always, whether in the guise of a duchess or a servant, bowed low and offered his chair, and remained standing until she sat down, while he said in his own grave, gentle way:

"I am happy to meet you, Mrs. Wetherbee, for I think you will be able to help me solve a great mystery, a very sad mystery to me."

"I heard you, sir." Lucinda was disarmed but not conquered. "You was asking about Gertrude Lester, what was that unfortunate creature to you?"

"Gertrude Vernon—not Lester—was my dear and honored wife, and now will you relate me the circumstances of her coming here, and her sickness and death?"

"Your wife, sir!"—cried Lucinda, her large eyes blazing fiercely, and ignoring his last remark—"then why did she come alone, sick and wretched, and in the guise of a beggar? bringing disgrace to her only

relatives, and finally sinking into her grave, broken-hearted?"

Mr. Vernon threw out his hand imploringly, the sharp truth cut deep.

"I will tell you, Mrs. Wetherbee, as far as I know myself, but as to whom we owe the great wrong we suffered, I have yet to learn. Did you not suppose Gertrude to be married?"

"Not I. I had little to do with her, whatever she had to say was said to my mother, who was alive then, and mother would hear nothing against her sister's child, but believed what Gertrude told her, that she had been deceived by a false marriage!"

"Great heavens! could such a monstrous wrong be suffered! No, Mrs. Wetherbee, it was no false marriage. We were married by an Episcopal minister, within the church, and by every rite, human and divine, for we had loved each other from childhood. In no one thing did we err except in concealment. But I thought I had good reasons for that. I expected to have sailed for Europe the day after our secret union, but my little sister was taken very ill the same night, the consequence was, I remained at home for four or five weeks longer, and I was so happy with my wife — though all our intercourse was necessarily most secret — that had she uttered one word of persuasion, I should have thrown up the voyage, and claimed her

before the world, let the consequences have been as they might. But she feared the result of the rash act to me, and did not speak the word to keep me. We arranged to have my letters sent to New York, and Gertrude's were to be mailed from there. At first her letters were a great happiness to me, but before many weeks elapsed they changed so completely, that but for the writing, I could not have believed they came from her. Then they came only at long intervals, and at last weeks went by that I did not receive a line, and I was on the point of starting for home, determined to end the suspense, when a letter arrived from my mother, dated the 25th of November, which changed the whole course of my life, and sent me an aimless wanderer over the earth. It stated that Gertrude had gone, no one knew whither, in company with an old lover, whom she had not seen for more than a year, and of whom my mother had been warned by Mrs. Lester, before she died, as a young man of entirely worthless character. The letter farther stated, that my mother had used every persuasion to induce the infatuated girl to abandon her mad course, but to no purpose; she left the house without exchanging a word with one of the family, without even bidding her pupil, my sister [Helen, good bye. Well, the news almost killed me," Mr. Vernon went on, after a pause, in which he seemed to struggle with old memories — "for

I was young, and loved my wife and trusted her as I would an angel, and the supposed evidence of her perfidy filled me with bitterness and hatred of my native land, and as I said once before, sent me wandering for fifteen years. Six months ago a strange and unaccountable longing to return home took possession of me. I was haunted with the idea that I was wanted. I resisted the desire until a circumstance transpired to send me on my homeward way. I arrived home Christmas eve., and found my father, mother, and my two sisters, with my youngest sister's family at the old mansion. After the excitement of my return passed, I began to wish myself back across the ocean. Everything about the place reminded me of my lost wife, and I had received no intimation that she was other than she had been represented to me, false and shameless. Two days ago a circumstance occurred that led me to notice a little maid — a companion to my sister's children. A remark she made, led me to question her, and the result was a conviction that my wife was innocent of the crime charged to her, that the child standing before me was my own, and that by coming here I could clear up a tissue of falsehood, devilish in its conception and accomplishment. Now I have been frank with you, and told you my unhappy story, will you not kindly tell me all you know regarding it?"

"Yes! yes! Mr. Vernon, you shall have all the in-

formation we can give," said Jacob, who had drawn nearer, his countenance beaming with pleasure as he comprehended that Ethel was found. "Only tell me, sir, is the girl Ethel — Ethel Lester, we always called her — alive and well?"

"She is alive, and well," answered Percy, a little curious at the man's emotion, "and now, as it is getting late, will you give me the casket of letters that was left in your possession?"

"Yes sir, yes, you shall have them, but you have taken a great load from my mind; I have not had a quiet night's sleep since the gal went away."

"Well, she never troubled my sleep," now sharply spoke Lucinda; "but there is one thing, Mr. Vernon, if that is your name, I shall not give up the letters 'til I've got my pay for keeping the youngone for eight years."

The gentleman regarded her in cold surprise. "Certainly, Mrs. Wetherbee, whatever you ask in reason, I will give."

The woman was mollified, and even looked ashamed, while Jacob remonstrated — "Get the box, Lucinda, do!" then to his guest — "For my part, sir, I don't want a cent, I am so glad the child's found; now any question you wish to ask, I will answer, to the best I know."

"Thank you, Mr. Wetherbee, if you will tell me

everything you know about Gertrude, from the time she came here until she died, I shall feel grateful. First, what day of the month did she arrive here?"

"It was the 27th of November," here interposed Ben, who had sat with open mouth, listening — "for it was the day I made the first payment on my farm."

"Yes, so it was," agreed Jacob, "for it was just two days after Thanksgiving, which was on the 25th, that year," and then he went on to tell about the poor sufferer until she died.

In the meantime, Lucinda came in with the casket, and placed it in Mr. Vernon's hands. He held it unopened until Jacob had finished, and put him in possession of all the facts he knew himself—but he recognized it as one he had given Gertrude several years before their marriage. When the story was told, he laid the treasure beside him — and said, as he opened his pocket-book :

"If you will name a sum you consider adequate to your trouble with my daughter, I will pay you."

Jacob grew red in the face, and figgeted, then as Lucinda did not answer immediately, he said :

"Anything you please, sir, a trifle for the children ; it is a shame to ask anything." Lucinda cut him short.

"A good deal you know about it, Jacob Wetherbee ! you have had no care of her, with her abominable temper !"

Percy silenced her with a motion of his hand. "We will not discuss the matter; name a sum you think will satisfy you."

Mrs. Wetherbee did, as large as she dared, half fearing it would be refused. But no, it was given her instantly, and more than she asked for. These matters being settled, Mr. Vernon indicated to Ben his readiness to go — then to Jacob, he said, "I shall remain in the village some time yet, Mr. Wetherbee, and may need your assistance, if you will oblige me?"

"Yes, indeed sir."

"Well, I will call on you, and if you would like to see Ethel, she is at the Hotel, and will remain as long as I do."

Bowing courteously to Mrs. Wetherbee, Percy went his way with a lighter heart than he had known for years. Arriving at the village Inn, he dismissed Ben with ample recompense, and went direct to his room, without seeing Ethel, for he had told her to go early to rest, and not wait his return. Once within his chamber, secure from all intrusion, he opened the casket and emptied the contents upon the table. With the pitying night let us draw a veil around the sorrowing man, and leave him to receive the certainty of the great crime committed against him and his young wife, — leave him to his remorse, and unavailing tears, as he reads scraps of writing. The faint, uncertain lines

marked the weakness and agitation of the writer, and in these bits of paper of different dates, the poor wounded dove first wondered, then grew hurt, then tenderly reproachful; then fear and terror thrilled through the lines that told of the letter read by Mrs. Vernon, in which her idolized Percy tells his love for a beautiful high-born lady, and her acceptance of him. Then her despair, and Mrs. Vernon's advice to go away, asking as a favor, that she would go without a word of farewell to the family. Then of her departure, the reception of the last cruel letter, acknowledging the false marriage, her utter sinking physically, and her earnest desire for death; the birth of her little girl, and then the last few lines, written but a day or two before her death, in which she conjures her daughter to forgive the father whose treachery had blighted her mother's life, and tainted her own, and so live that the reproach of her birth would be forgotten.

The gray dawn, and even the pale winter sun-light that shamed the smoking lamp, found the lonely man still at the table, his folded arms resting upon the scattered papers, supported his weary head.

Two hours later, Mr. Vernon entered the cheery little parlor, from which Ethel's bed-room opened. She had been up some time, and was neatly and properly dressed, but she would not go to breakfast—though twice called, until Mr. Vernon appeared. She was

standing by the window looking out into the familiar street, and at the little spirts of frozen rain that was falling from the clouds that had gathered since morning. The gentleman thought he had rarely seen so fair a picture — as he came near.

“Little daughter!” O, the infinite, infinite love in the grave, low voice. Ethel turned quickly, he extended his arms, this grand, handsome man, his eyes shining with his new and certain joy, and said again, “My daughter!”

With a glad cry of — “You are my father!” her arms were around his neck, and she was held in a father’s warm embrace, henceforth to fill the place of which she had been so long defrauded.

“Yes, I am your father, darling, you are my Gertrude’s daughter.”

“And she?” Ethel drew a little, just a little back, unconsciously almost, while her clear eyes were lifted resolutely to his.

“She was my dear and honored wife; I will tell you the story, by and by,” he kissed the upturned face, and this time the caress was returned.

Poor little Ethel, you will say, she was old for her years. Yes, but remember, she was taught in the most ripening of all schools, experience.

“We will have some breakfast now, I find you have waited for me, afterwards I will tell you a sad, sad

story, and then you may show me your mother's grave."

After the morning meal, and when once more alone in the privacy of their own parlor, Mr. Vernon related to his new-found daughter, the story that I have already told you, reader. Tears fell fast from the large unmoving eyes fixed upon his, as the pitiful sufferings and wrongs were recounted; and the sweet, grave voice faltered many time in the telling.

"I am positive now of the mistake I made by not coming home at once; or as soon as I was sufficiently recovered, nor rest one hour until I had found her, and heard from her own lips the truth or falsity of the monstrous report. But I believed I held her own letter in my hand that confessed her crime, and corroboration came from home in the fact of her secret disappearance. It nearly killed me, and when I recovered, the only wish I had in life, was never to see my native land again. I did not anticipate the blessing waiting for me here," he held out his hand as he spoke, and Ethel sprang to his side.

"Poor papa!" how the heart of the sorrowing man thrilled as the sweet lips uttered that loving name. "Poor papa, how you have suffered, but O, my precious mamma! only three years older than I am now, I do not wonder she died." Then there was silence, each busy with thoughts that pained, yet thoughts

that brought healing in the pain. At length Ethel said :

" Papa, do you know who forged those letters ? "

" I have found nothing yet, that proves the complicity of any one, " was the guarded answer.

" No proof, perhaps, but yet you feel sure you know the one who did it. "

Mr. Vernon looked into the clear, understanding eyes of his child, and knew that, in part, his own suspicions had been anticipated. He answered slowly, still caressing the hand he held.

" I may feel sure, dear, in my own mind ; yet in absence of proof, it is best to give the suspected person the benefit of the doubt. It cannot restore to me my wife, or you, darling, your mother, to drag this wicked thing to light. It is enough for me to know, my Gertrude was true and pure, and you are her daughter, as for the rest, her dear memory shall be cleared before all the world, or our world ; and I shall hope to render your future years so bright, that you will forget the hardships of your childhood. But I had forgotten, I have a letter for you. "

" For me ? "

" Yes. Among the letters in the casket was this. " Mr. Vernon drew from his breast pocket a letter, yellow with age, but sealed, and addressed to Ethel Lester. " Lester was your mother's maiden name, but the writ-



"Little daughter!" ——— Ethel turned quickly, he extended his arms, this grand handsome man, his eyes shining with his new and certain joy, and said again: My Daughter!



ing is not her's; from the style I should judge it to be the writing of her aunt, the kind old lady you call grandmother."

"It is from dear grandmother," said Ethel, as she broke the seal. It was directed to be opened on her eighteenth birthday, or when she should leave the protection of Jacob and Lucinda Wetherbee. It is most likely it escaped the sharp eyes of Mrs. Lucinda, when she searched the casket; however that may be, Ethel received the missive with seal unbroken, and was now eagerly perusing it. It was a very affectionate letter, written at different times, and not very long before the old lady died. To her little darling, as she called Gertrude's child, she told all she knew of her parentage, and how to communicate with them, should she ever deem it advisable, then with much loving advice, the letter closed, adding a request that Ethel would go to Squire Wilson, and show him the letter, and tell him it was time to act. Ethel read, and then handed it to her father, and remained silent, while he perused the closely written sheet.

"Do you know Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, he is a lawyer, and always attended to grandmother's business. He used to be away from home a great deal; for he was quite a prominent political man in this section, and was sent to Concord, and afterwards to Washington, and then was sent to Germany,

"Well, I will find out if he be at home, if so, we will soon learn what it is your mother's friend wishes you to know. But we cannot go out to-day, for see, it is raining, and freezing as it rains."

There came a sound of voices in the passage, the host was speaking — then a rap. Mr. Vernon opened the door, and confronted a large, fair, kindly-faced man, whom the landlord hastened to name—"Mr. Wilson, Mr. Vernon," the gentlemen clasped hands, each instantly recognized his own kind in the other.

"Come in, Mr. Wilson, we were just speaking of you. Come in Mr. Martin."

"No sir, thank you."

When he turned from closing the door, Percy found Ethel's hand in that of the stranger, who was saying: "So, you found your father, little one; quite a Knight-Errant you proved yourself, ha! Mr. Vernon, I am glad to know you, sir, for more reasons than one!" Percy bowed, and gave a chair, and then seating himself, drew Ethel to his side. Mr. Wilson went on.

"I have just returned home, after a two weeks' absence, and the first thing I heard was this wonderful story, of which every mouth is filled, though few seem to know anything, really, about it; but I thought our little friend would need me, so I hastened over without waiting for you to seek me."

"You are very good. In looking over a casket be-

longing to my late wife" — Mr. Wilson's kindly face became positively radiant at this — "I found a letter from Mrs. Adams addressed to Ethel, and it closed with the request that she should go to you, and say it is time to act."

"Yes, ah yes, I understand. A short time before the good old lady's death, she came to me to consult about having a new will drawn up, though the old one was allowed to remain — as it had for years — in her desk. She was more undecided about this, than anything I ever knew her to attempt. She said: 'I do not want to wrong Lucinda and her children, yet by reason of her unhappy temper, I dare not leave my little grand-niece wholly to her care, for Gertrude's child must be provided for beyond question.'

"The result of this interview was, this somewhat curious instrument," and Mr. Wilson drew from his pocket-book some folded papers, selected one, and passed it to Percy. It was a will tersely written, properly signed, and witnessed with the names of four townsmen. Mr. Wilson being named as executor. In this will the testatrix, after due preliminaries, went on to say — that she bequeathed Ethel Lester, daughter of Gertrude Lester, the sum of two thousand dollars, should she remain with Lucinda, or in her family until her eighteenth birth-day, or before, if Ethel should marry, and provided Ethel should have been sent to

school, and received the same educational advantages, and for as many years as Lucinda's own daughters, and providing that from the time of the testatrix's decease, to Ethel's eighteenth birth-day or marriage, she had been as comfortably and respectably clothed, in every respect, as Lucinda's own children, and as well treated; but failing in all this — should Ethel be obliged to leave Cedar Farm, on account of unkind treatment, or if the trustees deem they have sufficient reason for removing Ethel from the care of Lucinda, then they shall pay whatever compensation Lucinda shall demand in money, not exceeding two hundred dollars per annum. Then shall Cedar Farm, of two hundred acres, with buildings, stock, and farming tools, all in as good condition as they are at present — usual wear excepted — be held for Ethel's benefit, from the time she should leave the farm, until her twenty-first birth-day, or marriage, then to be delivered to her uncontrolled possession. Then followed a long description of Cedar Farm, its boundaries, and in what manner the land was laid out, the number of buildings, of stock, of tools, and the worth of all these separately. Everything was made so clear, that the will of the testatrix could not be mistaken. Percy read it through carefully, folded and handed it back to Mr. Wilson.

“You are surprised, Mr. Vernon.”

"I am, indeed, for with such a document in existence, I cannot understand how this child could have been left all these years to the tender mercies of that woman."

"I will explain. You notice the will names me as executor, the rest are merely witnesses, to render the will beyond dispute. Soon after the old lady's decease I was sent to Germany, where I remained a number of years. When my time expired, instead of returning home, I went East, and was gone two years more. It was here a letter reached me, detailing the suffering of this poor little child. The writer, Dr. Cummings, begged me to come home and attend to it at once, or give others the power to act in my place, as he believed the girl would die under her present barbarous treatment. I was shocked, conscience stricken, and without an hour's delay made preparations to return. I had known Mrs. Wetherbee to have an abominable temper, but I had not supposed her capable of ill-treating a child of such tender years. Perhaps you will wonder that the towns-folks did not rescue the little one from her miserable situation. Ah, sir! few people care to meddle with the fortunes or misfortunes of a friendless, homeless, moneyless waif, for the existence of a will, placing her above want, was not dreamed of, except by the witnesses, and they were sworn to secrecy. Well, I hastened home as fast as wind and

steam could bear me, but when I arrived in my native village, Ethel had disappeared, and not a trace of her could be found. A girl answering to her description, had been noted at different points far below here, which led us to believe she had found her way to some manufacturing town or city.

"We have been untiring in our search, advertising, offering rewards, and have employed the sharpest detectives all along the route, though it is now evident we were altogether on the wrong track. Won't you tell me, Ethel, how you got away, and how you succeeded in baffling those who were interested in your recovery?"

Ethel grew rosy, and looked at her father; she did not like to remember that most unhappy period.

"Tell Mr. Wilson, dear," and she obeyed, and in as few words as possible, told the story as she had told it to her father. Mr. Wilson applauded her bravery and good sense, and looked as though he would like to know the mystery of Mr. Vernon's long absence from home, and that gentleman, most anxious to rescue the memory of his beloved wife from all suspicion, once more dragged the sad story to listening ears; stating the simple facts, as he had to the Wetherbee's. Mr. Wilson was a silent listener, but Percy knew he had his warmest sympathies.

Afterwards he turned to Ethel, and said: "Do you



know the contents of the paper I read a little while ago?"

"No, papa."

"It was a will, and by it Cedar Farm, and all the money left by Mrs. Adams, is yours."

"Mine! is it possible that Cedar Farm is my very own?"

"Yes, my child, it is yours, beyond question, or will be when certain formalities have been attended to," replied Mr. Wilson; while Mr. Vernon regarded with attention this outburst of delight at the possibility of possessing a property not worth a thousandth part of that which she was heiress, as his daughter, yet she had never seemed conscious of his wealth.

"But consider, my darling. You will turn out the present occupants, who have, for years, been secure in their title to the place; are you pleased to do this?"

"O, papa, I did not think of the Wetherbees; but they are rich, without Cedar Farm."

"That is true," said Mr. Wilson, "Jacob Wetherbee is the wealthiest man in the county."

"But tell me why," urged Mr. Vernon, "are you so delighted with this gift? are n't you content to receive your fortune from me?"

"O, yes, papa, but I am glad to have something of my very own, to do with as I please. I was intend-

ing to ask you to buy me a nice place here somewhere, but I would rather have Cedar Farm than any other."

Both gentlemen regarded her inquiringly, and her father again asked:

"But you have not told me, yet, you mercenary little woman, what you want with the farm? do you intend to remain here, and send me back alone?"

"Dear papa," and the little fingers locked themselves about his neck instantly, and the velvet cheek, red and burning with excitement, was laid upon his head. It was the first voluntary caress she had given him. "Nothing can ever keep me from you; but I want to give the farm to poor, kind, Mrs. Atkins and her children, forever. She was the kindest, and only friend your unloved child had here, for many years, if I except John Lines, who worked on the farm. They were both good to me, but Mrs. Atkins was very poor, —and her husband was not respected, though he was not a bad man — yet she always found something nice for me to eat, or a little money, though she worked hard for all she had, and always, always, had some loving word for me. O yes, yes! I am so glad that I can make her comfortable, and able to send her children to school; beside, I am sure Mr. Atkins will do better, when he feels that he is no longer looked upon with contempt." The reasoning was very acute, though

only a child's reasoning, and both gentlemen acknowledged the truth.

"Have your own way, my child, make your friends as happy as you please, you cannot be too grateful for kindness."

"I cannot help feeling grateful for kindness," replied Ethel, her heart swelling at his words of approval. Poor little one! small had been the commendation in her short life.

The gentlemen parted at a late dinner hour, parted, mutually pleased, and the long, friendly acquaintance that followed, justified the opinion they formed of each other.

The storm increased, as the day wore on, so as to render it impossible for Ethel to go out; but after dinner, Mr. Vernon wrapped himself to suit the weather, kissed his child, bidding her amuse herself, for a little while, until he came back. She held up an old, half-worn volume, with a smile. "I am never alone in such grand company," she said. He went out, and she had no need to watch the solitary figure up the village street, going in the direction of the church, to feel assured the steps would linger by the low grave under the snow. He was still in sight, his tall form bending before the storm, and Ethel dreamily watching him, and going over all he had told her, when a hasty knock came upon the door, and before she could

answer, it swung back, and Mrs. Atkins, with the landlady peering over her shoulder, stood before her.

"O! my dear Aunt Lizzie," and Ethel ran to her with outstretched arms, a mere handshake would not do for the grateful, loving child, and if Mrs. Martin had doubted the poor woman's welcome, she was satisfied now.

"I have been waiting in the kitchen three hours, to see you, dear, ever since I heard you was in town, but Mrs. Martin thought you would not like to see me while your father was present. He is your father, sure?"

"He is my own, own father, Aunt Lizzie, the grandest and best of fathers, and he would have been glad to see you, for I have told him all about you, and we should have been at your house before this, if it had not stormed!" Ethel had dragged the elder woman in, and seated her in the nicest chair, by the cosy fire, saying: "There, now we will have a good talk." Then to Mrs. Martin, with the air of a little queen — "Will you come in, ma'am?"

Now this was just what the landlady wanted, for she was in a fever of impatience to learn the particulars of this wonderful change in the girl's condition, but the transition was so marked between Ethel's warm, loving reception of poor Mrs. Atkins, and her perfectly civil, but distant treatment of the landlady of the Washing-

ton House, that the latter could but feel she was not wanted.

As the door closed, Ethel drew a low seat by the side of her friend, and nestling her toil-hardened hand in her own soft-palms, said :

“Now tell me all about yourself, and the children, and then I will tell you my fairy story.”

“I am sure it is more wonderful and beautiful than any fairy story could ever be, and I am so glad, my darling, I may call you my darling, still, main't I ?”

“Yes indeed, always call me so, or anything you feel like calling me,” then laying her head down upon the clasped hands, and looking up with laughing eyes, made bright with starting tears, continued: “I expect you will call me your good fairy one of these days, for I am going to prove myself so to you, even as in those dreadful years, you were my fairy godmother.”

After all the young girl's questions had been answered to her satisfaction; she told her listener word by word all that had happened, from the hour she had left Mrs. Atkins, to this hour of happy communion between them; sitting there in the gray of winter's early twilight, the storm still beating against the windows, and the room only lighted by the red glow of the coal fire in the grate. Ethel had again laid her head upon the folded hands, her eyes thoughtfully fixed upon the fire, and the disengaged arm of her humble

It is most probable Mrs. Vernon would have shrank back, horrified, from contemplating the murder of Gertrude. There would have been something ghastly in the stark, blood-dripping form ; in the fearful knife, or her own fair hands coarsened with the clotted stain. She might have hesitated before assuming the responsibility of stilling forever the exquisite machinery, by mingling the subtle drug in the cup, and pressing it to the poor girl's lips ; and it is possible, had she been able to foresee the result of her machinations, she would have paused, faltering, before plunging her soul into the pit of a terrible sin, henceforth to cower in guilt and remorse, until long years here, or hereafter, should restore its purity. But just as truly as though she had plunged the knife in that gentle heart, or put the poison to her lips, Mrs. Vernon was the murderess of Gertrude.

Percy knew this, and though he determined to try once more to soften her proud, stubborn heart, so if possible, to learn the truth, yet he concluded to make a permanent home in the city of Helen's adoption ; that his mother's hatred of Gertrude might not cloud the life of his child.

When all the arrangements at Lincoln were completed satisfactorily, and the crocusses and daffodils were already springing above the beloved dust, Mr. Vernon and his daughter went back to his father's

house. There he was warmly welcomed by the old gentleman — whose hair had grown quite white in the past three months, — and Ethel's reception was all he could wish, even the haughty Alice had the delicacy not to pain her brother by coldness to the child; but Mrs. Vernon utterly refused to see him, or the girl. Words cannot paint the satisfaction of Mrs. Gleason, when she held the girl she had so loved and cherished with the unselfish love of humanity, close in her arms, assured that she was the child of her brother and the dear friend whom she had held so precious, all these years, in spite of the reproach under which she had rested; while the little ones could not love her more as a cousin, than they had as a playmate.

The next evening after Percy's arrival, he fulfilled his promise, and in the presence of the assembled family — for Mr. Gleason had also arrived — he again stripped bare those agonizing years, and his sad, sad story, from the hour of exquisite content when he made Gertrude his wife in that summer midnight, to the completion of her vindication in Lincoln, by the exposure of the fraudulent letters in the casket. He made no accusation or comment, only told the facts word by word as he had learned them, and read the letters found in the casket, leaving the listeners to draw their inference, the only inference possible, and when he ended, there was not a dry eye present.

Percy returned with Mr. Gleason to his native city, and selecting a residence in keeping with his wealth, fitted it up elegantly, and prepared to commence house-keeping with his lovely young daughter, who grew every day more dear to him. He had changed too, it seemed; the woful gloom that had so long invested him, had parted, and the glory of hope and satisfaction shone in its place, while the old ambition to be of use in the world, was gradually taking form in his mind.

On one point he was determined. That was to have Ethel educated at home; he would not send her away to boarding-school.

"I cannot part with her," he said to Helen, "I have been defrauded of happiness so long; I will send her to some private home-school, for the present, then I can look after her myself, and when we can find a lady competent to fill the place of companion and governess, I will engage her at any price if she can be had, to fill that position to Ethel. There are many such who would be glad to accept the situation I can offer, if we only knew where to look for them, and you must help me, Helen."

"I will indeed, Percy, but it is a more difficult task than you may suspect. There are always more or less ladies within the circle of my acquaintance, who are every way accomplished, and competent to fill so re-

sponsible a place as governess to our little girl, and who would be glad of the position ; but who would have social relations and interest outside of your house, that would require very much of the leisure not devoted to the legitimate duties of governess, thus leaving Ethel nearly as much alone, as when she is attending school."

"Then what would you advise, sister?"

"Just what you contemplate. Send Ethel to Madam Andrea's school, where Alice and Maud go, and wait patiently and search carefully until we find the right person. I would not be particular for a governess, but rather a companion ; a person of sufficient cultivation and refinement to be a model for Ethel, though she may not be quite up to a professor, in text-book knowledge. Old enough to have had some experience in the world and its mysteries, yet young enough to live in sympathy with a young girl's nature. In short, a sweet, womanly woman, who will not accept her task altogether for the pay, but because she loves it, and whose warmest interests may become centered in your family."

Percy looked at his sister thoughtfully, and without speaking for several moments ; at length replied : "To find the person you describe, were indeed difficult, my darling. I should be obliged to find the counterpart of my sister Helen, and I do not believe she exists."

"Fie, sir! I shall kiss you for that," and she suited the act to the word. "Now listen dear. I have a lady in my mind, who would fill the place delightfully, but I do not know where she is at present; however, if you will wait, I shall be sure and find her if she is in existence."

"Do you know her personally?"

"O, yes! we were roommates and classmates for three years at the seminary, and we kept our friendly relations unbroken until shortly before her husband died — for she is a widow — then she seemed to drop from our midst, without a sign. I have spent many sad hours marvelling what could have become of her, and have taken means, in a quiet way, to trace her, fearing she may be in actual want, for I have reason to believe she was left poor, though her husband was considered wealthy when alive, and they certainly lived in affluence."

"Did you know her family?"

"Yes, her mother was one of those gentle, loveable women, of perfect culture, belonging to a titled race in her native land; her father was also English, but a literary man, and though he was well and honorably known here and in his own country, he never accumulated wealth; so that when he died — which he did very suddenly, and was soon followed by his wife, — my beautiful Margaret was left with only a few pitiable

hundred dollars, as sensitive and unfit for toil as the most delicate blossom from the hot-house, is for the garden in all seasons."

"Had she no other relatives?"

"An elder sister, who was also married. I never liked Agnes, nor her husband, George Mathews, and I rather think Margaret found her home with them unpleasant. I know she married a man of their selection, and much against her own wishes, and I know, also, she was most unhappy while her husband lived. Mr. Mathews left the city with his family just before Margaret became a widow, and I understood they went to Germany; but I do not believe my dear friend went to them, and if she is alive, I will find her."

Helen kept her word. Meantime summer, autumn, and austere winter had each brought their changes, before a trace was found of her, who is, henceforth to play a conspicuous part in this drama of facts.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAYS WE LIVE IN.

"Despite the blemished beauty of thy brow,
Thou would'st be lovely could'st thou love again;
For love renews the beautiful: but thou
Hast only pain." — OWEN MEREDITH.



THE sweet clang of Christmas bells broke on the midnight storm, but awoke no response of gladness in the heart of yon sad mother, holding her sick child; watching with hot, tearless eyes, the flushed face, and restless limbs, tossing in fever agony. The shaded lamp had burned low, but its dim light fell upon the woman crouching in the rocking-chair, and the little sufferer held upon a pillow in her arms, while the rest of the room was in shadow; yet could be marked, the furniture rich and massive, and the carpets and curtains luxurious in their velvety folds. Rare pictures hung upon the walls, books in costly bindings were just visible in the gloom, and many a little nicknack of use or ornament, revealed the taste and presence of a woman, and yet the room, though lofty, was dingy, and the paper cracking from the walls. The windows, loose and decayed in their
ment, could not keep out the piercing wind that

suddenly rose higher, stirred the heavy curtains through the closed blinds, and touched with chill fingers the bowed form. She started apprehensively, glanced at her babe. No danger! he could not feel the cold while the fever raged; it is yourself, poor mother, who will suffer for this.

She drew the crimson blanket-shawl closer about her shoulders, and with one pale hand, put back the mass of black hair that had fallen about her face, that face so sad, so full of woe. She looked like one who had drained the measure of human suffering to the dregs, who had known all of life, had suffered all that wrong or wrong-doing could inflict, and now lived only for the tiny thing, at once a source of joy and anguish.

Patiently she sat in the same cramped position, as the long hours wore towards morning; untiring she watched every change, and from time to time, moistened the parched lips, or bathed the hot head, turning from side to side every moment; or tenderly toying with the soft hair, lying like floss of gold on the pillow. O, the holy, holy love of a mother; is there aught on earth so unselfish!

By and by, the sharp grit of market sleighs gliding over the frozen snow, and the sound of awakening life in the house, told of the approach of morning; then the gray daylight crept in, and made visible the objects rendered a black mass by the expiring lamp.

baby, she could not, indeed did not think of applying to a soul for assistance.

As the day grew apace, a shuffling step stopped at her door, and a clumsy knock sounded, but not waiting for an answer, the frowsy head of the maid-of-all-work peered in.

"Please ma'am, Miss Ely wants to know how baby is, and if you wants anything?"

The wearied one raised her finger to hush the girl, then pointed to the stove. She understood, and coming in, whispered some good-natured words in her kindly, clumsy way, removed the smoking, offensive lamp, and did some other act to relieve the almost torpid woman, who could only repay her by a grateful look. After kindling a fire, and bringing in a hod of coal, the girl said :

"That is all the coal you've got, Miss Evelyn, shall I order you some more to-day?"

"I do not know, Janie, I will see by and by. Will you ask Mrs. Ely to come to my room as soon as convenient?" O, the weary, hopeless tone! O, the despair wailing through the low-breathed words.

Another hour passed, and then again came a knock, and the landlady entered. A not unpleasing woman, dressed in a showy cashmere robe, with soiled, silken facings, and a petticoat of coarse embroidery. Her hair was still in curl papers, and on her face, the traces of

borrowed color, and lines of care, yet her appearance was agreeable, somewhat stylish in a large way, she looked just what she was in fact, a shrewd business woman, the prosperous keeper of a respectable lodging house, who was smart enough to extract a fair competence, after a long widowhood, spent in hard toil. She was not hard-hearted, and it was with genuine good-feeling that she came forward, and took the child tenderly, and uttered words of kindly, human greeting to the worn-out mother.

"There, rest your arms a little, and drink that," indicating a cup of fragrant coffee she had just brought in. But Mrs. Evelyn only leaned back with a sigh, pressing her hand over her aching eyes. Mrs. Ely watched her with a curious expression, as though wishing to speak upon some matter, yet was not quite assured of the propriety of doing so.

"Is the doctor coming again to-day?"

"Not unless I send for him."

"Why don't he come as he ought, until the little dear is better, and not wait to be sent for?"

"He said he was told to call once, but that he would call again if I sent for him."

"Just like some of those uppish sort!" exclaimed Mrs. Ely, indignantly, "I would send for another physician!"

"You know I have no means of paying one, and it

is about this I wish to speak with you this morning. My jewelry is all gone, and the money for which you sold it gone also. I have only this left," holding up a thin hand, on which a ruby glowed redly. "I will try and keep it at present," turning it lovingly on her finger, "but with your help, I will sell my furniture, and the rest of my pictures, and the proceeds must enable me to get through the winter."

"But what will you do without your furniture?"

"O, you must let me have a cheaper room, and furnish it for me. I will pay you the back rent I owe you, and as soon as Willie is better, I can get some more embroidery, and earn a little something, as I did before he was taken sick."

"Yes, that is the way it begins; sell all you have got, for a tithe of its worth! strip yourself of your last garment! deprive yourself of every comfort! toil unceasingly early and late for the merest pittance, until health, then life give way! and if your baby live, God pity him. It were better a thousand times, he never wake from this sleep, than live, if the parents who launched him into being for their own pleasure, do not feel just responsibility, and leave him to starve, freeze, or hang, as the case may be, unless some more humane person cares for him!"

Mrs. Evelyn was gazing at her in astonishment. What did this unusual outburst mean? but the other went on.

"I wish to speak freely with you, and you must not be offended, for I have been your friend, and will continue to befriend you all in my power; you know this?"

"Yes indeed! you have been more than kind to me; but I do not know how I can do differently. If my darling lives, I must live for him, but it is hopeless, hopeless strife." The wretched tone and expression attested the truth of what she felt.

"I know it, poor child! I have not lived alone for nearly twenty years, with three children dependent upon me, without learning all the misery want can teach, but I have weathered the storms, and hope to take life easy hereafter, but were I young again, I would not wear out in thankless toil, when there are other ways to live."

"But I do not understand you; what can I do?"

"You will listen to me without taking offence, will you not?"

"Certainly."

"Well, your husband has been dead but a year, and you have used all the money you had when he died, a small sum, I grant you, but more than you could earn in thrice that time; you have sold your jewelry, for less than half its value, yet here at the beginning of winter, you are without money, in debt, with a sick child in your arms, making it impossible for you to earn even the pittance the killing toil of the needle brings you.

But it will be weeks before you can do more than take care of this little thing, if you escape a fever yourself. I do not mean to be hard with you, but I must have the rent of my rooms, or I cannot live myself. Well, though your furniture is very nice, and cost no end to money, yet you would realize but little from its sale, because it is rather old-fashioned, for the fact of its having been in use, is enough to render it old. I would give you more than any one else, and let it remain where it is, yet it would not bring more than double your indebtedness."

The expression of the listener grew more hopeless, if possible; the words seemed unnecessarily cruel, but like a skillful surgeon, Mrs. Ely first probed the wound, before proceeding to bind it up, or suggest a remedy.

"I see no other way, however. Let the money go as far as it will, and perhaps when that is gone, some other course will be opened; if not, death is still before us."

"Nonsense, do not talk of death; I would not allow such thoughts, if I had that child to live for, especially if I had your years and face." Mrs. Evelyn started, and an emotion like indignation flashed into her eyes. "Stop, do not misunderstand me, I would advise nothing that would compromise you, but you have been shamefully wronged, do not sink under it, but let yourself be taken care of."

would beg her to go on, and say all she knew or suspected. Mrs. Ely, receiving no reply, went on.

"I told you, you must not be angry with me, if I spoke plainly, for I cannot be mistaken in my surmises. I know the unhappy life you led with a dissipated husband; I know, for I have marked, the constant and untiring kindness, the delicate and loving attention, this man paid you, for more than a year before your husband died, and I know the relief his death brought you; and I know too, for I am not blind, of the unbounded, self-sacrificing devotion you have since lavished upon him, who is now killing you. What, though you did sin in loving, you deserve the tenderest return from him for whom you sinned, and would receive it too, from a true-hearted man, but if he has left you, it is a shame for you to waste your health, and dim your beauty in vain fretting, when there are many who would place you beyond want, for a tithe of the affection you throw away on a mean, ungrateful villain."

Do not look at me, my reader, with so much scorn, because I let Mrs. Ely speak in my book, and having let her speak, I must let her do it according to her light and stand-point in the world. She is typical of her class, who fill a large space in social life. If you have never met her, be thankful, for many a delicate, fine-fibred woman like my poor Margaret has, and may

again. She went over and touched the freezing hand kindly, as she murmured:

"I must go now, and see to my work, and will send you up a box of Christmas Hanners: sit and eat something, and then lay down and get a little rest. While I am better, the fever has turned, and he will sleep a long while; I will come up again after Hanner."

She cast one searching look at the bowed head, the face well hidden by the pale hands, as she turned from the bed where she had laid the sleeping child, and with her feet went quietly out, knowing she had said enough for the present.

Do you turn from her in horror, my reader? After all, Mrs. Ely was not by any means the wickedest woman in the world, although she was unscrupulous. So long as one did not compromise a respectable name and appearance, she did not think it worth while to question too closely, whence a sufficient income was derived. A fine state of morals, you will say. Ah, well, a struggling boarding-house landlady is not the only one who permits this same easy opinion in ethics. We could ascend many rounds on the social ladder, and find her counterpart amid those whom the uninitiated hold as shining lights. Mrs. Ely was a good-hearted woman, too, as many a gentle act of charity and pitying kindness, unknown and unnoticed, save by the recording angel, can testify.

With such pure deeds against her name, who shall say they did not cover, as with a mantle, many a loose principle, that she had tolerated in her trying, caresome life? Then she was well acquainted with poverty, and all the evil it brings in its train, and believed herself justified in endeavoring to save one so lovely in person and heart, from its environment. "It is not," she reasoned, "as though she had never erred, and she may do a great deal worse by and by, rather than let her boy suffer."

As the door closed upon her landlady, Mrs. Evelyn rose to her feet, and walked quickly two or three times across the floor, her flashing eyes showing the resentment, which conscious error held in check. To think, she told herself, she should dare to advise me thus! and I must listen in silence, for what can I say? Am I indeed so low, that she should dare to breathe such thoughts to me? Sweet Jesus, take me to yourself! Wringing her hands in this silent, agonizing commune, she heeded not the coming footsteps that halted at her door, or the knock that sounded once, twice, nor heeded, until the door opened, and she stood face to face with him who had been the subject of Mrs. Ely's indignation.

Mrs. Evelyn followed her first impulse of gladness, and sprang towards him, but his half scornful glance checked her cry of welcome, and his indifferent move

towards the window, repelled the offered hand, so leaning against the bed's foot, she waited for him to speak.

Without removing hat or gloves, he drew his overcoat forward, and sitting back against the window-seat, said in a cold, deliberate voice :

“ Well Margaret, I have come, what do you wish ? ”

Oh, what did she not wish from him ! Gratitude and care, which in humanity he owed her ; tenderness and devotion, that now she so much needed, and which he had promised her so many, many times, a rescue from the poverty or shame which menaced her from every side, and from which, had he one generous impulse, he would save her at any cost. She had thought much of all these things, since she had marked his growing indifference, and though, as she had told Mrs. Ely, she would not hold him save through his love, yet she could not cease to hope he still loved her. She had sent a message a few days before, that Willie was sick, and pleaded for him to come, determined to hear from his own lips, if he had abandoned her, to pour out all her soul in one wild prayer of desperation ; and know the worst ; feeling sure his late neglect had been but to try her, and sure also, that when he should see how she suffered, and sure of her mad, unconquered love that had swept every other consideration in its headlong course, he would take her again in his arms, and bring back the glory of happiness, by making her his wife.

But now he was here, conviction of his determined desertion was in every movement, and chilling tone, and like an icy hand, it seized her poor quivering heart. Her lips were dry, her tongue silent, her eyes hot and tearless; she could only look at him, all her love, all her agony, centered in her gaze. He met her eye for a moment, then to hide a momentary embarrassment, which he had the grace to feel, he rose, and approached the bed.

"Is your boy very sick, Margaret? I sent word to Dr. Thracher; did he call?"

"My boy! Oh, Allen! Look at this child! From every thread of yellow hair on his brow, to his tiny feet, he is your image. Can you so cruelly ignore his claim, when you have told me a thousand times, the wrong done him should be righted as soon as it was possible; I am free now, tell me, as you hope for mercy ever, will you keep your promise? will you save your child from destitution, and his mother from despair?"

In her passionate appeal, the lady leaned forward and clasped his hand, but drawing it away, he replied with freezing distinctness, though he knew every word he uttered was more deadly, and far more cowardly, than the plunge of a knife to her heart.

"Really, Mrs. Evelyn, if it was possible to be surprised at anything you can say or do, I should be sur-

prised. The child which you insist on calling mine, — but of the fact I must always have a doubt, — I will see that he is taken care of, if you desire to give him up to me, but our past intimacy cannot be renewed. Your passionate outbursts are tiresome, your jealous exactions annoy me ; these reasons alone would be sufficient to prevent such a course, even if the relations I am about forming did not."

"What relations?"

The tone was so low, her manner so quiet, so entirely different from a moment before, that the gentleman turned to look at her before answering. Seeing nothing to fear in the downward face, so white and still, he replied, yet half doubtfully, —

"I am to be married to-night."

She raised her eyes to his, one look, then again bent over her babe. He never forgot it in all the years that were to come. It followed him through the day, he saw it while pronouncing his marriage vows, it leaned above his nuptial bed, and was ever before him in the busy day, but that was all. No word of remonstrance or reproach, not a tear or sigh. Still leaning above her babe, she asked in the same quiet tone :

"Who is she, Allen?"

"Miss Selwin. I thought perhaps you had heard." He still watched her uneasily ; he could not read this strange quiet. Ah, there are deeper depths to that



I am to be married to-night.



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nature than you ever dreamed of, Allen Boyed. Your theory of women, poor fool, is, that if they err, though their error be loving such worms as you, you may cast them off like a soiled rag, and they will not wish, nay, they will not dare to rise from the slough to which your treachery flung them. But for once you will learn your mistake ; learn that sin and wrong may act only as fire to separate the pure soul from the dross of weakness, and lift it so high above the plane on which you stand, that gentle pity will be the only emotion that you can hereafter arouse. O, man ! great in your lofty self-sufficiency ; you have yet to learn, that there is such strength of purity in the souls of most women, such instinctive clinging to everything most holy within them, that though their feet may slip above the pools of sin, and they plunge as often therein, yet they will rise again and again, and by mere force of native integrity, shake off the slime of circumstance, and stand as untarnished as when they came unsoiled from the hand of God.

To Allen's last remark, Mrs. Evelyn replied : " No, you see I live very retired." She smiled faintly. " Willie requires all my care, and I have no company since you do not come."

The man felt uncomfortable, and wished to be gone, yet lingered.

" I will take care of the boy, Margie, if you will let

me have him," he stopped short, a look answered him. After a moment's uneasy pulling at his glove, he added, "and if you need a friend," hesitating again, "or help of any kind, let me know." There was no reply. "Won't you say good-bye, and give me good wishes?" this time holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, Allen, and if you are as happy as I wish you, you will have nothing to ask for." Her voice was still untremulous, but she did not give her hand; and Allen Boyed went out with the unquiet conviction, that he was at last estimated at his worth, and that should he at this hour offer his hand and name to this sad, destitute woman, she would refuse them. And he was right.

A nice dinner was sent up to Mrs. Evelyn, and she made a show of eating it, and later in the day, when Mrs. Ely came to her room again, she met her with quiet, almost cheerful demeanor, deceiving the woman at first, who soon saw, however, it was the quiet of utter hopelessness, changing sooner or later into action of some kind. She felt sure her advice would be considered, if it had not yet been, for though the lady did not refer to her visitor of the morning, this shrewd reader of human faces did not need to be told his coming had brought no felicity, nor left satisfaction; and she knew, too, something must be done soon, and she felt sure she would be consulted, before any step was

taken, then it would be time enough to speak, so she did not approach the subject again, neither was the matter of disposing the furniture referred to.

Another long night of watching, another weary dawn, yet the little one slept, but weak and wasted, just hovering on the confines of the other world. Something must be done for him, and for herself, for his sake. Material wants must be attended to, and this served to rouse her; the still luxury of grief is not for the poor. Mrs. Evelyn had slept some during the last night, and Mrs. Ely had sent up her food regularly, and her fire had been replenished, so that the strength of the desolate one had not quite failed her. She had thought much, too, and positive now of her lover's desertion, she had considered her position, and the various ways open to her, few, and meanly paid at that. The wild chaos in which her great want of rest, disappointment, and self-contempt, had tossed her brain, had left little ability to reason clearly, it is true, and often during the interval, between Mr. Boyed's visit, the day before, and the night just past, the temptation of self-murder, taking in her dead bosom the little creature to whom she had given life, had returned again and again. The rest from unaccustomed labor would be such a relief, the rest from pain, the pain of her scorned love, and the sting of self-scorn, would be so sweet. Why must she live? what need of her in this

crowded world, where every one seemed to jostle every other one? In all the broad land, there would not a heart grieve, or an eye grow dim, should she lie cold in her grave to-day. Then in the night, as a vision came before the half-crazed woman, a scene, that drove the nearly formed resolution of double murder from her mind.

Before her lay a broad plain, seemingly miles in extent, with a gray, vaporous sky low down above it, without a ray of sun to warm or lighten it, but eternal twilight forever brooding, with no star to illumine, or moonbeam to brighten the desolate plain. There were groups of shrubs, and many trees stood stark and sere, without motion, in the airless space, and the grass that covered the ground was dried and brown, while the bat and toad, and all the creeping things of night, flapped about her head, or crawled silently at her feet. Equally soundless, the forms of men and women glided about, or crouched upon the bleak plain, but all silent, strange, and seemingly unknown to each other. Then she seemed to see herself standing in this gray place of shadows, holding her babe in helpless terror, while above her, and drawing nearer, was a spirit-like being, in a faintly-illuminated space, and while a look of holy commiseration rested upon his face, he extended his arms and took little Willie from her bosom, and nestled him in his own, then in sad, pitying voice, said :

"This is chaos, the home of the suicide, who with daring hand, has rent the soul from its human tenement before its time. Here in silence, darkness, and idleness of night, must be spent the years that were allotted to its earthly life." The form faded, the light went out, and the sad voice grew low, and passed like the whisper of a wail. Poor Margaret awoke with terror, but all thoughts of suicide were dispelled with her dream of an overwrought brain.

She had not been able to decide which way to turn, when Mrs. Ely made her morning visit. The woman was kind, but Mrs. Evelyn knew she would soon renew the subject of the day before. Of two things she was certain. First, she must have money by some means soon; second, that only one of two things would keep the good-will of the landlady. To submit herself to Mrs. Ely's direction, and follow her advice, or find some way to pay her obligation. She refused to consider the advice for an instant, anything, anything rather than degrade her womanhood by selling her charms. But how to meet her indebtedness was still racking her brain, when taking up an old daily paper, and mechanically glancing over the columns, her eyes rested upon a "Personal." Scarcely ever before giving such an item a thought, it suddenly possessed for her a morbid fascination. "I will do it," she muttered, as she took in the meaning. "It would matter little

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what became of me, but you, my darling, must be taken care of, and after you are better, I shall be able to find something to do, Mrs. Ely's belief to the contrary, and repay any loan I may effect."

Without waiting for her good angel to suggest a better way, and perhaps there was no better, or plead the cause of womanly modesty, deaf to everything except her wrong and want, she went to her desk and dashed off two or three lines, and then as though fearful her resolution would fail, in the same hurried manner, she wrapped the crimson blanket-shawl around her, and nearly concealing head and face in a furred hood of black silk, started on her strange venture. Going to Mrs. Ely's sitting-room, she begged the woman to sit with Willie for an hour, while she went out on an errand. Catching the meaning of something in Mrs. Ely's glance at her unusual attire, for she had not changed the black silk morning-gown she wore in her chamber, she said with a kind of self-scorn, for answering the suggested thought, —

"Do not fear for me, I shall return in an hour; when I conclude to commit suicide, I will not leave my baby to burden any one." Mrs. Ely got up immediately.

"Certainly, dear, I will go, but you took me by surprise, you are always so particular about your dress. Can't Janie go for you?"

"No, I must go myself."

The attendants at the Herald office were engaged with various people, when Mrs. Evelyn entered, so she was obliged to wait. Wait! that delicate, high-bred woman, neophyte in this phase of worldly speculation, unheeding and uncaring for the curious eyes regarding her, or the motley crowd in which she stood. Finally a clerk beckoned to her, and she presented the folded paper. It was nothing uncommon in itself, yet he did not reply immediately, when she demanded the price, and after she had paid it, taking nearly all her scanty store, and gone out, he stood reading the plain, smooth writing, as though he could there solve the problem of her appearance in that place.

"What is it, Bates? a governess, housekeeper, or what? she seemed to be no ordinary person." The speaker had been an interested witness of Mrs. Evelyn's movements, and now came forward to learn her business.

"I am puzzled to judge her, Mr. Vernon. She is certainly no common person. You see it is a personal, and rather an uncommon one," and he handed the paper to the gentleman. It read:

"A woman in distress, desires a loan of two hundred dollars without security. Address Mrs. Brainard, P. O."

"It is odd, but I suppose she understands herself," said Mr. Vernon, handing back the paper, affecting an

indifference he did not feel. Mr. Bates looked sorry. Knowing Mr. Vernon as he did, he hoped to interest him in this woman, whom he was certain, reading faces as he did that came before him daily, was not of them. Mr. Vernon had advertised in the different daily and weekly papers for a person to fill the position of companion to Ethel, but as yet been unsuccessful; then other work, mostly charitable deeds, had brought him in contact with the Herald people, so they knew him well; and Mr. Bates, having a good deal of humanity in his composition, felt a keen pity for the sweet face so full of pain, half hidden under the silken hood, and it grew upon him after she went out, and he was really disappointed when Mr. Vernon went out without farther interesting himself in the matter.

Mr. Vernon did go about his business, but all day long that white face with its red, scornful lips, so at variance with the pleading, wistful look in the heavy-lidded eyes, into which he fairly looked, when she was waiting to pay the price of the advertisement. More than once on returning home at nightfall, he quickened his steps as a crimson shawl passed him. He peered furtively beneath every hood he met, but the face he sought was not there. Through the evening, amid the surrounding of his splendid home, she still seemed present. The prattle of his child, the converse of friends, music, books, all failed to dispel the strange, unaccount-

able interest this woman, met under such unfavorable circumstances, had inspired him.

It was long past midnight, but the fire burned brightly in his cosy study, and he felt no inclination to sleep. Rousing himself from a deep reverie, he turned up the gas, and drew some paper towards him. Dipping his pen again and again in the ink as he paused long and thoughtfully, and when he did write it was hesitatingly still, as though undecided as to the manner of addressing his correspondent. The note was complete at last; it contained but few lines and the signature, the number of a box at the post-office. Enclosing a bank note of a far greater value than asked for, he sealed and addressed it as directed in the advertisement. He reasoned thus: "If want compelled her to this step, the money I send will save her, and she cannot doubt my disinterestedness, since I do not ask an interview, but if I mistake her, she will seek more of me."

Percy had not told his sister Helen, of the day's doings, as usual, though she was present at his house in the evening, as was also his sister Alice. There was that in the circumstance of his meeting with the beautiful stranger, much which he could not explain truthfully, yet satisfactorily. In his heart's deepest consciousness, he believed in her integrity, yet he could only answer the questions, that would naturally

arise, by stating that he knew absolutely nothing about her.

He knew, though Helen was single-hearted as a child, she would naturally wonder what the cause that could bring a lady to such a pass. She was charitable as an angel of mercy, yet he could not allow even the tenderness of this beloved sister to rest upon the fair woman, who had thrown, all unconsciously, such a delicious unrest about him. He wished, as the days went on, that he had tried to learn her place of residence; she might have been in the midst of danger or sickness, he told himself, where friends as well as money would be acceptable. But he had refrained from doing so, that he might leave her quite free to act as her own impulses prompted. It had been four weeks since meeting Mrs. Evelyn at the Herald office, and he had received a line of earnest thanks, and a promise to repay the money as soon as it should be possible. That was all. He was in this fever of unrest, when an incident occurred, that brought about the thing he most desired, an acquaintance with his beautiful mystery.



CHAPTER XV.

HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT.

"Beautiful, yes — with her hair
So wild, and her cheeks so flushed!
Awful, yes — for there
In her beauty she stands hushed
By the pomp of her own despair!"

— OWEN MEREDITH.



TWELVE years before the opening of the last chapter, Allen Boyed and Margaret Brainard were very dear friends, I had almost said lovers. Perhaps I should have been right, though she was unconscious of the fact, and he never acknowledged it. She was a happy, gleesome girl, not yet sixteen, and promising all the beauty for which she was afterwards admired. Living with her parents, in a grand old collegiate village, her only other relative, a half sister, a dozen years older than herself, she grew from babyhood as lovely and pure as her favorite water-lily. Her mother, a beautiful and refined woman, had trained her daughter in all those gentle, high-bred qualities to which she herself had been accustomed, without checking the exuberance of her warm, human nature. Her father was an author, men said a dreamer, whatever the truth of that, he was

a scholar and a genial polished gentleman, and while the sweet face of Margaret first drew Allen Boyed — then a law student — to the house, the parents charmed him to come often. Allen finished his course in college, and went south to study law, fully resolved, should fortune favor his efforts, to return in a few years, and make the lovely Margaret his wife. But he had a cool, scheming, ambitious brain, that looked far into the future. If he wedded this girl, all the wealth she would bring him would be her bright self — for her father was poor, and she would go moneyless to whoever won her. So he went his way, speaking no word that would interfere with other plans, should he change his mind, yet leaving his image indelibly stamped upon the fresh young heart.

He entered the office of a prosperous lawyer in Baltimore, and in less than three years married his daughter, and only child. Astute and unscrupulous, he possessed energy and perseverance to carry forward any scheme his teeming brain conceived, and it was not long before he was looked upon as a man rising among men of no mean abilities, and when, in a few years, his patron died, all his immense business fell into the hands of his son-in-law, as well as the wealth accumulated by years of industry and success.

In the meantime, Mr. Brainard and his wife had both died within a few weeks of each other, and Margaret

was left dependent upon her half-sister, a haughty, ambitious woman, who never loved the younger one. She was married to a wealthy merchant, and both herself and husband had too much pride to let the sister labor for her own support, by teaching, as she proposed to do; therefore they mutually decided that marriage was the proper thing, and the most proper way to get her safely off their hands. Suitors were abundant, but feeling no interest in any one, and the sweet hope of Allen's return, hidden away in her heart's deepest deeps, she did not hesitate to reject every overture. Agnes did not interfere, until Mr. Evelyn proposed, and he, she at once decided, was the husband for Margaret. He was a friend of Mr. Mathews, from a neighboring city, a man of fine family, and reputed wealth, of good appearance, and but little past forty. True, he was addicted to many evil habits — or so rumor whispered — but then rumor is a false-tongued myth, Agnes reasoned, and even if he did sometimes drink to excess, and sometimes gamble, other men did the same, men of undoubted standing in good society. It was better for her sister to accept him, with the advantage of an assured position, than a younger man, who very likely would prove no worthier, with his position to attain.

So she flattered, and coaxed, threatened and stormed, but Margaret was invulnerable to the lover's blandishments, or a sister's entreaties, until hearing of Allen's

marriage, she found it was the hope of his return that gave her strength for resistance, and buoyed her up in this sea of difficulties, and when this hope failed her, she was more disposed to listen to Mr. Evelyn. Any fate she thought preferable to a dependence upon an ungracious sister.

I wish I might tell you how my heroine, with the wisdom of a mature woman, refused to give her youth to a man more than double her own age; how, with the lofty principles of a regenerate spirit, she steadily refused to become the wife of a man whom she not only did not love, but for whom she felt a positive dislike. I wish I could show you how this girl of tender years, shy and unassuming by nature, suddenly proved herself possessed of such greatness of understanding, as we never meet with outside of books. Books at that, made by folks with more imagination than practical knowledge of real men and women. Would that I could paint her alike insensible to a lover's persuading, or a sister's badgering, give the resolution of a dozen men to her shrinking heart, and show how she turned from the protection of friends, and an offered home of luxury, and took up the burden of toil without a fear; but I cannot. She was only a girl, with a loving, clinging nature, and so loved and clung to her sister in spite of her ungraciousness.

She was only a timid girl, so shrank from taking up

the responsibility of self-help, under the ban of her friends displeasure, and to which she was unaccustomed and unfitted, by her past training. She was only an inexperienced girl ; so did not know the fearful thing it was to enter marriage without love ; did not know that it required all the power and sweetness of that divine passion, to redeem the marriage relations from galling bondage. She was only a yielding girl, — with none of that firmness her after life developed — so when the hope of her lover's return failed her, she submitted the ordering of her present fortune, to her sister and brother-in-law. Thus, at nineteen, with beauty almost beyond the beauty of woman, and a warm, loving soul, ignorant of the world's wisdom, she became this man's wife. He was nearly old enough to be her father, the better part of his life wasted in the excess of depravity, deeply tainted with the vice through which he had waded ; an evil disposition, and hateful temper, a cold, sneering, snaky temper, made up the man to whose arms the natural guardians of Margaret consigned her. He could not appreciate a pure-souled woman, but he could admire a beautiful one, and the pleasure of exhibiting one so fresh and rare, gave a new zest to his vitiated capacity for enjoyment, and enabled him to play the rôle of lover almost really. He made her mistress of elegant rooms at his Hotel, robed her in bright and dainty apparel, and lavished

upon her the rarest jewels that money could buy. He took her everywhere, where the world could see and approve; so that her days were a continual round of gayety and excitement; and if she pined for the old life of freedom, she was not allowed time to dwell upon it, for new scenes and displays claimed her thoughts, so she lived in a perpetual whirl of change;— for a time, then Mr. Evelyn, tiring of his beautiful wife, went back to his old haunts and amusements, leaving her once more to herself.

Never having been affectionate, he became indifferent to her, as to any pretty thing grown dull, and often for days together he would not speak to her, except, perhaps, in the presence of others, where for decency's sake, he paid her the respect due his wife. Sometimes, after an evening's debauch, he would chance to offer a caress, and she, shrinking from his tainted breath and soulless eyes, would get a curse, and often a push for her temerity. From disgust at his habits, she learned to dislike and fear him, and dreaded nothing so much as being alone with him; but she saw less and less of him as time went on, and enjoyed at least one blessing, that of being let alone.

The years that came and went, brought little change. In public, he still treated her with consideration; he dressed her with elegance, because she was his wife; he paid her bills, and left her to herself. A sad posi-

tion for one so young, so lovely, so impulsive and loving. Had she been vain and shallow, the glittering frivolities of her mere existence might have satisfied her, and a love of display filled the void left by failure of natural affection. Not so Margaret, she, true child of a large-hearted mother, felt keenly the mockery that named her Mrs. Evelyn, knew the title to be a pretense, and her place by his side, a sham; began dimly to realize that she had no royal right to the name she bore, since the law and the usage of the law gave it to her, instead of receiving and wearing it as a gift of love from a loving heart, that held her first and dearest among women. She knew her place by his side a sham, by the shrinking of every fibre of her being at his approach, and her utter loathing of a caress bestowed. She was frightened at the terrible state in which she found herself, but knew not how to better it. She felt the days slipping away in worse than idleness, without the power of employing them to a better purpose. Had she possessed her own home she could have gathered about its shrine purer influences, but in the crowded panorama of hotel life, she was alone, and in idleness, heart, brain, and hand, not healthfully occupied.

It was under these circumstances, that Allen Boyed — after the absence of nearly nine years, met his early love; and he felt a surprised and delighted admiration

in contemplating her perfected charms. Fastidious in all his tastes, the delicate sweetness of Margaret, when a girl, was to his senses like the fragrance of a flower, or a strain of sweet music, but she could not dignify him socially, therefore he sacrificed her to his ambition. Afterwards, when he stood foremost among men in wealth, and that kind of honor that comes of success, he would have gladly made her his wife, had she been free—for widowed and childless, he could afford to indulge the only true affection he had ever felt, and one so lovely and cultured, would add all that his home had lacked.

But she was not free, and he did not long remain ignorant of her unhappy condition, or scruple to avail himself of it, to reawaken the old esteem, in which he knew she once held him. Intensely selfish, he would scruple at nothing that would serve to gratify his precious self. Yet there were chords vibrating in his own heart, that never responded to mortal passion before. His early love for Margaret had been very precious, and very sweet, yet not so precious but that ambition proved a successful rival, and if sometimes he found the tender memory stealing through the chambers of his busy brain, he put it away with a sigh, perhaps of regret; yet a sigh too, at the folly of sighing.

But now, as he grew to know her better, every desire of his soul grew towards her. He drank in her



glorious beauty, like inspiration. The slightest touch of her hand, or a loosened tress of her perfumed hair, or even her warm breath upon his cheek, thrilled him like rare wine. He was mad to hold her in his arms, and taste the lusciousness of her full, red lips, and read in her deep eyes a return of all the passion smouldering and permeating through his being. O yes, she must love him! madly even as he did her, he would not care to possess her else—this epicure of passion—without the divine essence rendering perfect the gift. This inwardly; outwardly never demonstrative, he did nothing to attract attention; for though a thorough libertine, it was in the most refined acceptance of the term, and he shrank from the stigma, which he deserved as much as any man living.

Neither did he wish her conscious that he aspired to be other than a friend, but in many thoughtful acts unmarked and nameless, he made her realize indirectly that he deplored her wretched state, though never directly did he refer to it.

Without being a handsome man, Allen Boyed was one to whom a delicately fastidious woman, like Mrs. Evelyn, would be attracted. Elegant in person, faultless in dress, and a pale, refined face, framed in clusters of golden-tinted hair. True, his mouth was repulsive. It was full to grossness, but a silken rippling beard, a little lighter than his hair, hid it, so that only his white,

even teeth showed themselves when he smiled, and that was often. His eyes were beautiful, dark and tender, owing perhaps, their expression to the long lashes that bent upward, like we often see in babyhood, while it was difficult to decide on their color, they varied from the darkest violet to the pale blue of the forget-me-not, as the mood of the moment was light or dark. His voice was wonderful, low, and flexible as the note of a bird, and it was said of him, that the winning subtilty of his marvellous voice won more cases for his clients, than the power and ability of his appeal.

He was not many weeks an inmate of the same house with Margaret, before he made his influence felt. Never intrusive, he yet lingered near her in the changing throng, never praising, yet his unspoken worship was more powerful than words. She learned to look for his coming, and marked the hours by his absence. Her heart recognized the meaning of his voice, simulated to love's low cadence, and responded with passionate abandon to his claim. Did she receive at her husband's hands neglect and abuse, the gentle pity in those violet eyes stilled the pain. Did cold, snaky cruelty rouse all her being to arms in a tempest of hate and grief, that wonderful voice had power to sooth the storm, and make her forget indignity and wrong.

About this time Mrs. Evelyn resolved to carry out a

purpose that for years had lain half formed within her mind. Dim and shadowy as the purpose had been, in the last half dozen months it had taken definite shape and meaning; and she quite resolved to separate from her husband; fully and legally if allowed, but live apart from him she must at any cost. His hidden abuse was becoming unbearable, his offered caresses more unbearable still, the only tolerable hours of her life were those of the early day when he was engaged in business. She had dwelt upon the subject of a separation, and viewed it in every conceivable light; she knew all the difficulties that would start up in her way, and she knew the opposition she would meet with at every step.

Her hope was that her husband—to whom their union seemed as irksome as to herself—would consent to a divorce without publicity, or that her sister, compassionating her, would protect her from society's harsh or pitying comments, one as difficult to bear as the other. She went first to her sister, and with her it proved as she feared, not as she hoped.

She had never made her marital troubles a matter of gossip, even with her sister, so for the first time she lay bare her misery, and with all the pitiful pleading of an utterly hopeless woman, she begged for that sister's assistance and countenance in the step she was about to take. But she might as well have plead with

a stone, ay, better! for a stone would have remained cold, still, and unanswering, nor sting the poor tortured heart with needless vituperatives. A stone could not have been more cold and unfeeling than Agnes, but no sooner did she comprehend the wish and purpose of Margaret, than she burst into a torrent of vindictives that fairly overwhelmed her listener, and confounded her with their unnecessary bitterness.

"If you dare," Agnes concluded, "you poor spiritless creature, to do a thing so fraught with shame to your relatives, and disgrace to yourself, I will disown you utterly!" looking at the drooping figure as though expecting an answer, but receiving none, the angry woman went on.

"If you had the spirit of a mouse, you would not submit to the indignities of which you complain. If you would show proper resentment, the man would not dare to treat you in this manner."

Margaret thought! How little the half-embruted man would understand proper resentment, and the idea of wrangling with him, ugh! But she said nothing. Getting no reply, Mrs. Mathews went on.

"Supposing Mr. Evelyn consents to a divorce—which is not probable—how are you to live? I mean, where get your support? Do you expect my husband, with our increasing family, to take care of you?"

"I have not thought much about a means of sup-

port," replied Margaret, with the quiet of utter disappointment. Hopeless of her sister's help or countenance, she did not care to reply to the rain of words hurled at her, or waste her breath in useless intreaties. "It is certain that Mr. Evelyn has an abundance, and if George Mathews would befriend me, and arrange the matter with him, letting him see how unhappy I am living with him, I have no doubt he would—for decency,—settle enough on me to support me in comfort; I should not require a large fortune." "Oh, sister!" she suddenly burst out—clasping her hands around the woman's waist, and sinking on her knees, before her, "Oh, sister! do not turn from me, in this dreadful hour! I tell you, I am desperate! I have lived this miserable existence just as long as I can. Help me to escape this horrible bondage, or I shall break through it myself! If you protect me, it will be no disgrace, no shame; leave me alone to get my freedom it may be, for death is a million times preferable to the life I live, of humiliation, pain, and disgust!"

Agnes was startled, but immediately recovered herself, unclasped the clinging hands, and said sternly:

"Get up, and be a woman, if you can! I am in no mood for theatricals. If you choose to take your own life, do so! though I do not feel any fear of that; but I would rather see you buried, than figuring in a divorce suit. Of one thing be assured, if Mr. Evelyn

should give you up, he would not give you a dollar of support,—and no one would blame him,—and you need not expect anything from me. How many women would be proud to occupy your place, to-day, nor whine like a weak child, because the gentleman chanced to be a lover of wine, and occasionally drinks too much, or happens to be a little cross sometimes.” Agnes did not like the set, white face that turned from her to the window, or the open, tearless eyes that looked unseeing into the street. She continued more gently. “Go home, and when he is in wine, or bad humor, leave him to himself. Enjoy all the good you do have, plenty of money, pleasant acquaintances—who would not look at you if you should do this mad thing,—and all the elegances that you can desire, and plenty of leisure to employ as you please.”

“Leisure to think and go mad,” Margaret thought, but she only said, as she gathered up her shawl—“We go to the sea-side, to-morrow, I shall not see you again until we return in September, unless you come to N——.”

“No, we are going to New Hampshire, to board on a farm this summer. Mr. Mathews thinks it will be best for the children, as well as for ourselves. You should rejoice that you have not the worry and care of children, but can go where you please.”

Their adieus were made as quietly as though no

disturbing element had entered their converse. Mrs. Evelyn, with the conviction that whatever she did she must do alone, therefore must think well before she acted ; but just as determined as when she went to her sister. While Alice was complaisantly satisfied that she had effectually frightened the presumptuous idea from the silly girl's head.

The Evelyns were to spend the summer at a beautiful resort, situated on a wood-crowned promontory overlooking the sea. The company was not large, yet enough to make up delightful parties, being mostly the residents of the same house in the city. The gentlemen went and came daily, so that the evenings were a round of pleasure spent with the charming abandon of each one doing precisely as they pleased, chatting, dancing, singing, strolling, or boating.

Mr. Evelyn did not improve in his habits, or treatment of his wife, though he changed. From sneering, sarcastic outbursts of temper he became sullen, not speaking to Margaret for days together. He drank in greater excess, too, seldom coming from town with his brain free from stimulants ; but he had lost the power to wound greatly, and unless he added blows — which shame to manhood be it said — he often did now, she did not let his brutality disturb her very deeply.

One afternoon Margaret had been to the city, and did not return until after Mr. Evelyn. She had quite

settled in her own mind what to do, therefore as the preliminary step, had been to consult her father's old friend, who had known her from her birth — and he a lawyer of undoubted goodness and ability. Mr. Bradley listened to the story with so much commiseration that half the difficulties seemed removed, when she rose to go.

"It will be an easy matter, my dear child," he concluded his advice, "if Mr. Evelyn will consent to the arrangement. But if, from any motive, he insists upon a contrary course, it will make it far more difficult; for it will involve carrying your story into an open court, and lay the shameful thing before the gaping world. Do you think you can do this, and not shrink before the avalanche of criticism that may nearly overwhelm you?"

"I hope you will be able to persuade Mr. Evelyn to give me a separation, without appeal to force, but no consideration on earth will induce me to live with him after our return to town. I leave it with you to make the best terms possible, but always bear in mind my unalterable resolution."

"I will do the best I can for you; but don't you think I had better have a talk with your brother-in-law? Mr. Mathews is not an unfeeling man; perhaps, when he is convinced of your determination, he will stand by you."

"No," was the reply, with a sad smile, "Agnes is bitterly opposed to the business, as I have told you, and I should find but little kindness or sympathy from her, though she might consent to give me countenance. I have some money, enough certainly to pay all expenses, if I am obliged to, and I should be sorry to think, with all the advantages I have had, I could not earn my daily bread. I would sooner spend the remainder of my days in the capacity of a servant, than degrade my womanhood longer, by accepting my support at the price of self-respect."

"O, he shall do what is right by you in money matters. I will attend to that, neither shall you lack friends; you will lose none who are worth the keeping." Mr. Bradly shook her warmly by the hand, promising to let her hear from him at the earliest possible moment, and Margaret returned to N——, more sanguine of the success of her wishes than when she left there in the morning.



CHAPTER XVI.

SOMETHING MORE ABOUT IT.

"The night said not a word. The breeze was dead.

The leaf lay without motion on the tree,

As I lay at her feet. Droopt was her head,

One hand in mine; and one still pensively

Went wandering through my hair. We were together.

How? Where? What matter? Somewhere in a dream

Drifting, slow drifting down a wizard stream,

Whither? together; Then what matter whither?

—OWEN MEREDITH.



HE guests were assembled around the tea-table when Mrs. Evelyn arrived, and going to her usual place, gave her husband a courteous greeting as was her wont, whether he returned it or not. But he was in a worse humor than usual, for not satisfied with answering her only with a scowl, he made a remark in the course of the meal that stung her cruelly. Without noticing it, however, Mrs. Evelyn withdrew before he finished his tea, an act unprecedented in his knowledge of her, and his surprised stare that followed her through the dining-room, would have been amusing to the observer, had it not been so contemptible. Instead of going to her room where she knew he would soon follow, she threw a light burnouse of scarlet wool around her white dress,

and took her way to a distant, retired nook, formed by a grouping of rocks, and covered by a bed of soft, yielding moss, that formed a luxuriant seat, while the sea broke in murmuring melody far below. Here, flinging herself down, she gave up to the pain so long repressed, and sobs shook her form; disgust, anger, and hate for him who daily outraged her; by turns the strongest.

She was not long alone. Strong arms lifted her head from the ground, and rested it on a warm, beating heart. Gentle hands put back the loosened hair from her burning face, and without a word to check the stormy outburst, soothed only by touch and presence, until she grew calmer. She knew well who waited upon her so lovingly, but its strangeness did not occur to her, it was so sweet to be so tenderly cared for, then it was not strange, but as though she had found her rightful place at last. Neither did it occur to her as strange, when after a long, delicious silence, he told her of his love, hidden for years, the same through all time and change, how he would have kept silent forever, had she been happy, but her helplessness and patience always, but especially marked that evening, under a brute's insolence, made him forget every resolve of prudence, and gather her into his heart, to be her home hereafter, forever, if she would have it so. He would devote his life to her, he said, and by and by, when the

law should free her from the wretch she called husband, she should be made his honored wife, and in some far-off, beautiful land, they would forget the miserable past, in the heaven of the present. All this, and a thousand times more, was murmured with kisses, heart beating against heart in this first hour of wild, sweet passion.

Not to you, madam, in your home of luxurious comfort, will my poor Margaret turn for countenance. You who have been cherished by a fond husband, and guarded by his love from every ill, what do you know of the blighting curse of unholy marriages that drive more men and women to crime than any cause under heaven. So I accept your cold wonderment at a sister woman's error, and pass you by, knowing, for every one such as you, I shall find ten on whose pure breast her head may lie, though it may be in secret yet, and whose lips will kiss her tears away.

Neither from you, maiden, whose golden present is but a summer day, and whose greatest care is to choose a fitting color for your bonny face. Not from you, may the sorely tempted woman of my story expect pity. You would shed abundant tears over a maimed bird, or the dead carcass of a pet dog, but do I not know, O gentle Pharisee, that though the husband of Margaret might sit by your side an honored guest, and her lover receive from your lips their sweetest smile, yet you

would deem her unworthy to wash your dainty feet, though it were with her tears, nor dry them, though it were with her beautiful hair. O untried virtue, that turns scorning from God's wandering lambs, you make yourself seem more hateful than haggard vice !

Not so with you, matron, whose sad face acquired that look from many sorrows, whose heart has learned to the uttermost the meaning of neglect, and perhaps want, who have seen hopes spring into bloom and blight without fruition, and know, that as the diamond dug from the dirt and mire of earth, grows clear and luminous as the chisel of the lapidary, and its own worthless dust cuts and polishes it into a jewel of rarest worth, so the souls most opulent in all that constitutes perfection, have been tried by temptation, and purified by sorrow, until self-righteousness, pride of state, and all uncharitableness have been purged away, and they stand a shining mark in the darkness of social shams.

And you, true-hearted woman, toiling in the ranks of labor, aspiring to something higher and better than you have yet reached, who have heard the siren whisper of guile, and wavered before its glittering promises, and now standing firm in your womanly strength, with heart grown tender by experience, you will have a forbearing regret for my Margaret, sinking under duty's stern demand, for you know whatever of sin, whatever of weakness, nay, whatever of crime, be her's, each will bring its own punishment.

The waning moon was rising, lighting up the mist of the warm August night, until it lay like a silver mantle above the sleeping earth. The lovers had lingered until the latest reveller must have wearied and gone to rest.

"We must go, love," he said, gathering her again in his arms, "how can I give you back to him?"

"Do not fear for me, Allen, from this hour, I am only yours, in heart and act."

Lingering kisses answered her whispered pledge, and slowly they walked through the moonlighted mist home. On reaching the still lighted, though deserted halls, Mrs. Evelyn stole away like a frightened creature to her chamber, yet in passing her mirror, her own image, radiant and glowing, arrested her. Never did she prize her beauty as now, never as now exult in her charms, and she wished she was a thousand times more beautiful, and a thousand times more charming, and a thousand times more loving, that she might give it all, all a free gift to her lover.

She turned to the bed, the mindless wretch who tortured her daily existence, making it almost unbearable, lay in a drunken slumber, his filthy breath tainting the air, and his loud breathing making night discordant. With a shudder of disgust, Mrs. Evelyn wrapped a shawl around her, and laid down upon the lounge; it was not the first time by many, the bare floor was preferable to the softest couch by his side.

The weeks that followed were like glimpses of paradise. Every day a hope, and every night its realization. Long, stolen walks by the sea, under the glittering dome of those warm August nights, or drifting idly through the still twilights with only the vast, scarcely heaving sea around, and their slow oars keeping time to the lapping cadence of the waves. Even in the crowd, where not a whisper of their secret had been breathed, they lived but in the heart of each. True, their love was not a love to be proclaimed, but if it had been, neither of them were of a nature to flaunt their dearest interest before the world. She, from a delicacy that shuns comments, and he, from the astute conclusion that your interests are best served while they are yours. But all things are messengers of loving hearts, and those that love truly, need not the lip service, nor the eye that tells so much. The very presence is a content, and the casual touch of electric fingers leaves a benediction.

After waiting two weeks without hearing anything from Mr. Bradley, Mrs. Evelyn went again to see him, and to her regret and dismay, she found that he was at home sick, so that at present her divorce must wait. Allen urged the employing of another counsel, but she was unwilling to lay her affairs before a stranger, when by waiting a few weeks, Mr. Bradley could attend to them. For obvious reasons, Mr. Boyed did not offer

to prosecute the suit himself, so September came, and dropped its golden days one by one into the great past, and Margaret made of them a jewelled coronet to bind the brows of Memory, and through all the gloom that gathered around her afterwards, the tender beauty of those autumn days never grew dim.

The Evelyns, and of course Mr. Boyed, were the last to leave the retreat. The leaves were falling, and even the early frosts had lain white and glistening many early mornings, before Mr. Evelyn announced it was his pleasure that Margaret should return to town, and that rooms in a retired quarter had been secured for her, and furnished with her own furniture. Mrs. Evelyn hoped to remain in N—— until Mr. Bradly should be able to resume his business, but he was still at home, though gaining slowly, therefore she could do no better than to remove to her new home, with less dread, as Mr. Evelyn was about to go to the southwest on business for the firm with which he was connected, to be gone some months. He spoke of losses sustained, and the need of economy for the present, as an apology for the vast change from the elegant quarters at the Albion, to the rather dingy apartments at Mrs. Ely's. She was also informed that she must dismiss her maid, and retrench her personal expenses as much as possible.

"I will provide you," he said, "a certain amount monthly, and hope you will find it sufficient to meet your expenses, until my return."

She received his communication with simple acquiescence ; she was so joyous at the prospect of his absence, that the dingiest place would seem a heaven compared with the past. She was so simple in her tastes and habits, — or at least could make herself so, — yet such a perfect artist was she in dress and surrounding, that she could live on a much smaller sum than many a meaner dressed woman, and one more meanly lodged. She found little trouble in giving up her maid, for servants, wherever she chanced to be, served her because it was a pleasure, and very soon, poor, frowsy Janie at Mrs. Ely's, would have spent every moment's leisure for the "grand, sweet lady with the soft voice," and deemed herself well paid, with a kind "Thank you, my good girl," but as long as Mrs. Evelyn had money, Janie's devotion never went unrewarded.

She lived very retired after her husband went away, going no more into society, making no new friends, nor seeing the old ones ; but she was not lonely. Allen was constantly by her side, solicitous for her welfare, and devoting himself to her happiness, and their long twilight rides into the country, and evenings spent together, repaid for all other deprivations. The landlady was discreet, when she understood that Mrs. Evelyn wished to live secluded, and never spoke of her, so that the beautiful woman who had shone like a star in the gay world for half a dozen years, dropped as effect-

ually from the knowledge and remembrance of her acquaintances, as though the grave had closed over her. But I believe the general opinion was, that she had gone with her husband south. Margaret did not care, if she knew the report, so happy was she in her secluded life, with her music, her books, and her delicious hopes. It was the intention of the lovers, — they had come to this conclusion from the death of Mr. Bradly, — for Mrs. Evelyn to live quietly until her husband's return, then enter a suit for a divorce ; with this understanding, they tacitly agreed to forget the unpleasant subject, and wait patiently, and be happy.

Months came and went, each leaving its tribute of snow and storm, wind and calm, until the seasons ushered in sweet-scented June, then they laid a babe on Margaret's bosom, and she felt for the first time, the exquisite content of a mother.

A woman has never been truly blest, never known the holiest emotions of the soul, until she wears the crown of motherhood, until the little being she has carried beneath her heart, and nourished with her blood, nestles within her arms all her own. In after years, that child may bring her sorrow, wring from her eyes their bitterest tears, yet for all other joys, she would not part with memory of the happiness her darling brought her.

Thus with Margaret. With abundance of mother

element in her composition, she had been more than content to remain childless, rather than join in such co-partnership as the arbitrary decision of the law permitted her. But now it was such delight to trace in the tiny lineaments those she so fondly loved, and when Allen, with infinite tenderness in look and tone, would bend over them, and caress the wan cheek, and bid her be hopeful, and bring back the rose-tints to her sweet face, for in a few months now, she and her boy should be truly all his own, she would not have changed her lot for a kingdom.

Mr. Evelyn seemed as far from completing his business, as when he went away, but he wrote at stated intervals, and supplied his wife with means sufficient for all her wants.

When her baby was two months old, and she was on the point of writing to him, and stating her desire for a separation, intending to have a suit commenced immediately, a letter arrived, containing news that the writer was on his way to a point farther west. The letter also contained an order for several hundred dollars, and was written in a more affectionate tone than usual, expressing a hope that before long he should come or send for her, as he had quite made up his mind to remain permanently in the west. Of course Mrs. Evelyn could only wait after this, until she heard from him again; but she heard nothing more until

pulling, but distinct and sweet as the notes of a guitar, when touched by a master hand. Low and subtle, it fell upon the ear with enchantment, and no one listening to it now, but would turn with delight to hear it again.

She had passed extreme youth, she admitted twenty-eight, but whatever her age, she looked young. She was one of those women who never look old in society, and this was the woman for whose sake Allen Boyed perjured his manhood, and outraged the heart of a loving woman. He was first thrown into Miss Selwin's society by chance, then he sought her because others did, and then well because she decided he would answer for a husband. He had money, that was her main consideration, but added to money he had position, therefore he would do. She used every art of which she was mistress, to win him, and did it.

Had Allen been told in his earlier acquaintance with her he would wed the lady, he would have scouted the idea. He always intended to fulfill his promise to Margaret, and he knew and felt even while estranging himself from her, that in the wide world, he would never meet again so complete a woman. She filled his heart with sweetness that never grew bitter, her intellect met his in ready sympathy, and his esthetic eye was satisfied with her glowing beauty, and aside from her one error, loving himself too fondly, he could not find a

flaw in her womanly perfectness. For this error, he blamed himself more than he did her, and not being inclined to take much blame himself, he blamed circumstances more than either.

Miss Selwin studied her dupe, — for such he eventually proved, — thoroughly, as she did every one, and as usual, learned her lesson well. She saw he was a vain man, though like most vain men, he did not know he was vain, nay, would have been indignant, had he been made aware it was suspected; and few men were more susceptible to flattery, though he would have hated the flatterer if made conscious he was flattered. In short, she read his weakness, and used it, avoided his strength or obstinacy, so won the stake for which she played.

The consequence of her fine witchery was, as might have been expected from the first, on so self-centred a sybarite as Allen Boyed, the retiring, and never exacting Margaret, engrossed much with her babe, was neglected, and every hour, and every thought were devoted to the gay, fascinating Anna Selwin.

How can we tell when the change commenced? Perhaps he came less often, or lingered less loving by her side, and this may have called from her chidings, tender chidings, murmured between kisses, then growing into complaints, and then reproaches perhaps, as his visits grew farther apart, and briefer at that. Perhaps

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

2. Once the problem is identified, the next step is to define the objectives and goals of the project. This helps to clarify what needs to be achieved and provides a clear direction for the team.

3. The third step is to develop a plan or strategy to address the problem. This involves identifying the resources needed, the tasks to be completed, and the timeline for the project.

4. After the plan is developed, the next step is to implement the plan. This involves assigning tasks to team members, monitoring progress, and making adjustments as needed.

5. The final step is to evaluate the results of the project. This involves comparing the actual outcomes to the objectives and goals, and identifying any areas for improvement.

1. The first step in the process of the investigation is the identification of the problem. This is done by the investigator who is responsible for the study. The investigator must first identify the problem that is being investigated. This is done by the investigator who is responsible for the study. The investigator must first identify the problem that is being investigated.

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James M. Smith, "The People's Friend," Martha
Patterson, and the author, and some other friends
were present. The speaker was particularly kind to the ladies at
the Academy.

"I heard it from one of the chamber-maids at the Albion, ma'am, I have forgotten the lady's name, but she lives down back of the garden in one of those grand houses, and rides in her own carriage. She lives alone with her father, but they keep half a dozen servants. I expect she must be very rich, don't you?"

"Evidently they are," was the only answer. Mrs. Evelyn did not think much of the rumor at first, but it returned to her again and again, and there crept into her mind a sickening doubt of her lover's purpose. Was he really changed? Did he intend to desert her? O, no! no! it could not be! It *was* tiresome, as he said, to stay long in the close room, when the spring and early summer were so inviting. She did not blame him, since she could not go out with him, and when he was there, the baby would not allow her to sing, or read, or converse uninterruptedly, so she tried, poor heart, to put the torturing thought away; but she was left more and more alone, and his manner was so pre-occupied, and his treatment of her so cold, that she could no longer hide from herself the fact that he was cruelly changed, whatever the cause. As for Allen, he was not yet prepared to break with her; indeed, I am not sure he had at this time decided to give her up, and as long as she did not make her nose red with weeping, or get into a jealous frenzy, and utter many unwise and unreasonable things, he still thought her

the loveliest woman in the world. Like many another warm-souled woman, Margaret *was* unwise in this respect. She was bitterly jealous, and suffered as such women suffer, wise or unwise. Her jealousy was not the kind that springs from a mean, grasping spirit, that would have the person on whom it had by some permission of law or usage, been able to set the seal of ownership, devoted heart and mind to it, nor allow a throb of admiration for another, however beautiful or worthy that other might be. Such jealousy would hold for itself by mere force of might—the might of proprietorship—all that the trammelled heart is capable of bestowing, instead of holding it by the power of attraction, the only power that will bind one royally to another, or at least, all in that other that is worth binding. In one possessing this unlovely spirit, there is no self-questioning as to whether there is aught within itself to attract or hold its captive. That is of little moment. It says in acts if not in words, —

“By law this is my property; I do not care whether there is an atom in me that draws this spirit to mine, or a chord in it that responds to anything I can offer. I have a right to it, and I will have my rights, or we will both be miserable.”

Margaret was not made of such baseness, but she had laid at her lover's feet all that was sweetest and richest in her opulent soul, and her reward was all she desired,

to be the first and dearest in that lover's heart. She did not claim to be considered the brightest, the fairest, or the best, only the best beloved. She had such faith in him, such faith in his truth and constancy, that she never doubted his repeated assurance that this was so, or her security in this place, any more than she doubted the strength and steadfastness of her own affection. She never for a moment thought to control his emotions of love or admiration for anything loveable or admirable, well knowing that one must be meager indeed, of all the highest attributes, who can view without thrills of delight, wonder, and esteem, all that is good, beautiful, and rare. This in her rational moments, but it is difficult to philosophize in love; especially for love so deep and self-absorbing as Margaret's had been, and though she knew that the wild frenzy of jealousy that sometimes possessed her, when dwelling on her lover's deflection, was worse than useless, and that if there was nothing within him that belonged to her, she could not claim anything, and that any relations that were not what they claimed to be, were better dissolved; yet it was so difficult to turn at once from such secure convictions as she had held, and realize her beautiful hopes lay withered before her, her beautiful hopes that were so dear, so dear. Therefore she could not at once, and without a terrible strife, tear down her idol. I do not think she had tried to at

this time; she would by and by, and after, there would remain a cruel wound, that years might not heal.

One day in early autumn, Mr. Boyed called after a longer interval than usual, for he had been to Long Branch for the last two months. Mrs. Evelyn tried to be patient with his manifest indifference, and be reasonable in regard to their relations. After waiting for him to broach the subject nearest to both their minds, and he had already risen to go without a word, she told him of the rumors she had heard, and asked for his denial or affirmation; he did not reply immediately, but drummed on the mantelpiece by which he leaned, with his eyes fixed upon the floor.

"Why do you treat me so?" she cried passionately, "if you love me no longer, say so at once, and not come to me with the hollow pretence of being what you were, but are no longer!"

"I will go, Margaret, and come again when you are in a better humor, then we can understand each other better." So he went, glad, if the truth must be told, of an excuse to withhold yet longer an explanation, leaving the poor, passionate creature to sob and moan, and walk her floor through the livelong night in sleepless pain.

Thus Mrs. Evelyn was left, not only to wrestle with her wasted love, but bear the shame of the sad mistake she had made, and which rankled in her sensitive mind,

sharper than a sting. It is true, the disgrace that usually follow acts like those we have admitted, did not attach itself to her, from the fact that her lover had been so guarded in his attentions, until she was a widow, that the faintest whisper of suspicion had never been breathed against her name, and aside from Mrs. Ely, there was not a person who had a suspicion of the truth. But with a heart naturally pure, she suffered all the agony they suffer who err through weakness or temptation. What can cause deeper sorrows, than to feel ourselves possessed of powers to understand and value all that is sublime in purity, yet know we have cast a darkened cloud between ourselves and it? O, could we know how evils are punished in the heart of the evil-doer, we should be more charitable in our judgments.

Fortunate it was in some respects, that her child was left her, for it saved her from the utter desolation of heart that might otherwise have been. The constant care he needed, saved her from dwelling so much upon herself, and then the necessity of providing for the coming winter was so imperative, that she must rouse herself from her terrible unhappiness. Her sister was still in Germany, but had she been at home, it is doubtful whether Margaret would have applied to her, and of course she felt that she had no claim upon her husband's relatives. Allen knew all this, and yet, though

a rich man, he made no provision even for his own child, which any manly man would have done, though he had not a cent beyond his daily earnings. But Allen Boyed was not a manly man, he was essentially a mean man, especially in money matters, excepting when used to gratify self. He knew that this delicate woman would perish with cold and hunger rather than apply to him for one cent, therefore he knew he should not be compelled to disburse his abundance unless he chose, and without asking himself what a woman so delicately reared, and encumbered with a child, would do to support herself, he remained away from her week after week, without a word of explanation, and when Mrs. Evelyn in her despair, sent him word that the boy was very sick, he ordered his own physician to make one call at his expense, and see how the child seemed, but not to call again unless sent for by the mother. He did not call himself until she sent imperatively for him, as we have seen in the chapter before this. Thus matters stood, when the joyous chimes of Christmas bells fell upon their wakeful ears, she bending above her suffering child, and he dwelling with unaccountable dread on the morrow's eve



CHAPTER XVII.

TRUE HUMANITY.

"Thou art so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, that thou holdest it a vice in thy goodness not to do more than thou art requested." — SHAKESPEARE.



WHEN Mrs. Evelyn returned from the Herald office, she found a glowing fire, where before, there was scarcely enough to warm her large room. A pot of fragrant tea sat upon the stove hearth, and her table was laid with its usual care. Her look of mute inquiry towards Mrs. Ely, — who turned from administering something to the sick boy, — was answered :

"Yes, dear, I have taken upon myself to see that you are comfortable ; when your good fortune comes back to you, you can repay me ; what you are to concern yourself about is, to keep your strength and get your baby well, then we will think of what you are to do. So Janie shall bring up your meals as usual, only I will furnish them, and see that you are kept warm, while Dr. Jenness, who has called to see me since you have been gone, will come daily to attend Willie, until he is well." The good creature did not say she sent

of her, and her great fund of motherly sympathies were stirred to their depths, by the patient suffering that her white face expressed. Her utter loneliness would have touched the coldest heart, but Margaret was always courteous and unassuming, receiving the simplest kindness with gratitude, and all acts of attention with civil acknowledgment, so that one who knew her even superficially, could scarcely fail to love her.

Now, as this tried creature sat by the small table and made effort to do justice to the well-cooked dinner, she blamed herself for thinking unkindly and untruly, as she now believed, of Mrs. Ely. "I wronged her," she mused, "she would have waited for me, and I might have been saved the degradation of the step I have taken, but very likely it will come to nothing," and her thoughts persistently dwelt on one and another who had abundance, and on whom, in a moral point of view, she had a just claim for support. "I believe it is a delicate intrusion to make into the depth of a man's pocket, and I believe I was possessed with a species of delirium, when I had the hardihood to put that strange thing in the paper to-day, and I do believe my head feels strangely. O, dear, I hope my poor brain will not give way, until baby is well."

She leaned forward, and rested her arms supporting her head, upon the table, and there Janie found her an hour later, when she came to remove the debris of

dinner. With intuitive delicacy the usually stupid girl went softly out, leaving the table undisturbed, and it was not until the short twilight had nearly deepened into night, that the exhausted one was awakened by the faint baby voice, calling "mamma!" a cry that would hold back a tender mother heart from the very portals of heaven. Mrs. Evelyn roused herself, and, by a desperate effort, threw off, in part, the torpor that hung about her brain, and in all her limbs, and after attending to the little one's wants, and seeing him again drop into a deep slumber, she undressed, for the first time in two weeks, and putting on a flannel double-gown, lay down beside her boy. Janie came in, and cleared away the table, and in her clumsy effort to do it softly, she made noise enough to wake Rip Van Winkle himself; but she did not disturb the exhausted woman, through whose veins the fever-poisoned blood was slowly creeping, soon to burst into wild bounds of delirium. Once before going to her bed, Mrs. Ely came to the chamber she had made more comfortable. Little Willie opened his large eyes, and took again the medicine she offered him, then nestled back into the arms of his unconscious mother, without a word of fretting, and seemed perfectly content, so she lay beside him.

"You *are* a dear little thing," softly whispered the watcher, touching her lips to the delicate forehead, then

again, she regarded keenly the white, thin face of the sleeper, marked the sunken eyes with their dark rims, the hollow temples, and the red, red lips.

"I am afraid," she thought, anxiously placing her finger on the thin wrist, "I am afraid she will not go through without a fever; well, the city must pay me, if her sister does not." Ah, that was the secret of Mrs. Ely's good-natured liberality? you will say. Well, not exactly, but she had informed herself of Margaret's antecedents long before the present trying time, and within the last twenty-four hours she had made up her mind to two things; first, that she would not turn the helpless woman out of her house, nor see her suffer for necessities, neither would she lose the amount due her, nor whatever she was obliged to pay out, in the future, since she had a tongue, and knew how to use it, and the unfortunate lady had wealthy relatives, though few in number. She had also a large circle of friends, whom this shrewd woman believed would relieve her, did they know of her distress. Hence her sudden resolve to help her, and risk a loss. Though I protest again that her motive was not altogether selfish, and she *had* been kind to Mrs. Evelyn before she had formed her plans, but she justly reasoned: "since she cannot help herself, it is right her friends should help her. They are well able, and no doubt willing, did they know the circumstances." So she resolved, as

she turned lingeringly from the chamber that night, not to let another day go by without writing to Mrs. Mathews, and also, to let Mr. Evelyn's relatives know of the lady's sad condition, then they could do as they pleased. The poor lady awoke in the morning feeling the frail little hands of Willie touch ever so lightly her face and neck, as he had been in the habit of doing before he was taken sick; awoke to gather the beloved little form to her bosom, and became conscious in the effort that her head was hot and throbbing, as though a heavy hammer was beating in her brain, and conscious that it required all the strength of her poor arms to lift her baby. She had slept long and deep, too, for a nice fire was glowing in the open stove, and the room was warm and tided. She made an effort to rise, finally, but found herself so weak and dizzy, that she lay back with a moan.

"Mamma sick!" and the shadowy little hand went over the white face, caressingly.

"Yes, mamma is sick, Willie, but I must try," she remembered her venture of the day before. "I must go to the post-office, though," — and she smiled scornfully at herself for even giving the matter a thought, "though I do not believe there is a man in this city who would loan the pitible sum I asked for, to save me from starving."

She bathed, and put a fresh robe on her darling, and

then laying him upon the lounge, tried to open the bed, but was fain to leave it to Janie, who came in with her breakfast ; and while Mrs. Evelyn drank her fragrant tea, and made an effort to eat her toast, put the room in order. The bed was in an alcove, and while the girl was arranging it behind the curtain that separated it from the main room, she heard a slight moan, and with a spring, was just in season to catch the lady as she fell forward in her chair. She did not quite faint, and a cool drink roused her again in a moment, and bidding her humble friend be silent, she by a sheer force of will, made herself ready, and went to the post-office, begging Mrs. Ely, who came in, to remain with the little one until her return. The landlady, believing her advice had something to do with this going out, was patient to stay, though her morning's work was waiting ; and when the lady came back in a short time, Mrs. Ely read nothing in the glittering eyes and glowing lips, but the rapid walk in the keen air. As soon as she was alone, Mrs. Evelyn threw a dozen or more letters upon the table, and without removing her hood and shawl, sat down to open them. One after another were looked into, and their contents noted, though scarcely comprehended, yet enough to take the general drift, all asking an interview, or the information as to how she was circumstanced, promising if she was found worthy, or pleasing, or, well,

various other conditions were mentioned, most of them thought they would help her. With curling lip she gathered the self-interested motive of every one, and collecting each open sheet and envelope, as she had thrown them down after reading, put them into the fire, retaining but one, that from the first, she had laid aside without opening. It did not look very different from the rest, but it was the first letter she had taken up, and she marked the envelope large, white, and plain, and the chirography elegant, and so distinct, you could read it as readily as the largest print. She hesitated, "I should be so sorry," she mused, "to find the same spirit leering at me from the inside of this, that promises so fair."

She broke the seal with shaking hands, for a chillness had taken the place of the morning's fever heat, partly from her condition of health, and partly from the nervous dread of what she might find there. Unfolding the sheet of fine thick paper, she found but two or three lines, reading thus :

"Madame. Accept the inclosed in whatever manner you choose, as a gift, or a loan, in the name of Him who has made me abundantly able to give it to you, and should you need my assistance in any possible way, address a line to Box 13—."

Her poor thin hands dropped into her lap, utterly powerless to go farther. The instant change from

hopeless despair to the assurance of relief, the most contemptuous skepticism in human benevolence, to grateful faith, made her faint and weak as possible, and still retain her sanity. After the first moment of joy, she opened the double sheet, and a bank note of more than double the amount she asked for, lay bright and crisp in her hand. Tears, O, of such blessed relief dropped upon the messenger of good, and bowing her head, winged thoughts of thankfulness floated upwards from her sad heart, and watching angels caught the white blessings, and breathed them about the pillow of the giver, that night, and his dreams were sweet, and the influence followed him through the days that came thereafter, though he knew not the source of the exquisite hopes that haunted him like a strain of tender harmony.

O man, man, strong in your possession of health, and strong in your ability to earn money, why will you not use your wealth and influence to assist working, care-burdened woman? Not because she is pretty, and winsome, and her gratitude, or love, as the case may be, will prove a sweet tribute, and gratifying to your passion or vanity. What though she cannot be anything to you, what though her pale face and faded form holds no charm for you, and cannot quicken your pulse by a single beat. She may have been very lovely, or would be so still could you but penetrate beneath

the gaunt mask of woe and want, or she may possess what is better, sweet, womanly attributes, that would prove blessings to many, could she but rise out of the slough of poverty in which she is held, and from which you have the power to save her. Help her because she is a woman, and needs help. Let it be from no other motive than a disinterested desire to follow your Master's footsteps, a motive that can neither add to a sensual pleasure or worldly aggrandizement, and my word for it, you will feel a glow, a secret content, that trumpeted charities will never bring you. Would you not rather contemplate a grand, cultured woman adorning and sustaining the sphere in which she moves, or a man in his prime of useful manhood, standing pre-eminent among men, and think—This is my work, the result of the aid I gave a widowed mother. She has reared her children, qualified to adorn the highest walks of life, and this is my reward. A monument of fame, more enduring than the most costly pile of architecture ever reared by man.

Controlling her quivering nerves, Mrs. Evelyn wrote a brief line of thanks, and kissing the little thing that watched her so patiently from the pillow, she wrapped her shawl closer around her shivering form, and stepped out to put her letter in a box near by. She felt—she knew not why—that all traces of her half-

mad venture must be cleared away. She reached the end of her street, which terminated in the principal thoroughfare, and was waiting an opportunity to drop her letter into the box attached to the lamp-post at the edge of the sidewalk, when a plain, private carriage passed slowly along, hindered by the press of vehicles in the street. The occupant caught a glimpse of Margaret, as she reached forward to drop her letter in the box, for at the same moment a woman springing back to avoid a rearing horse, pushed the silken hood from her death-white face, and Helen Gleason recognized her friend, though shocked at the position in which she found her.

"She sees me," thought Mrs. Gleason, and bowed smiling, at the same time pulling the strap, in order to have her carriage turned into the other street. But though Mrs. Evelyn was looking full in the lady's face, she made no sign of recognition, and as soon as she recovered herself, turned and walked back the way she had come. Helen followed, as soon as the carriage could be disentangled from the press, but was only in season to see the scarlet shawl go up a high flight of granite steps, and disappear through the door. She marked the house by its cornering on a narrow court, and having the general air of old-time grandeur about it. Bidding her coachman wait, she went up the stone steps, wondering in what condition she should find her

lovely friend, dreading to prove what she feared, yet longing to put her womanly arms around her, and share all her abundance with her, if need be. As she laid her hand upon the bell, the door was flung open, and poor Janie, more wild and frowsy than ever, ran into her arms, nearly throwing her over.

"Beg parding, O, the poor dear lady!" and before Mrs. Gleason could get her breath to ask for Mrs. Evelyn, the girl had darted away, so she had nothing to do but to ring the bell. A young girl came down the stairs, having the same disturbed appearance, and to the lady's inquiry, exclaimed:

"Oh, she has just fallen down in a fit, and we are afraid she is dead! come this way," and Mary Ely led the way up the stairs, whence she had come.

Following with trembling limbs into the back chamber, Helen found the dear form prone upon the floor where she had fallen, and Mrs. Ely supporting the poor head, and trying to force something through the close-shut teeth. Without a word, Mrs. Gleason flung off her heavy cloak and furs, and sat down on the floor, and took the apparently lifeless head to her warm bosom, while her soft, firm fingers rapidly loosened the clothes about the throat and waist, and then dropped a few drops of ice-cold water on the bared bosom and deathly brow, while Mrs. Ely seconded every effort deftly and in silence. A quivering sigh

came at last from the nearly torped heart, and then the heavy lids lifted, but there was not a ray of consciousness in the black depth beneath, and only a faint, low moan answered to the loving words uttered, and kisses pressed on the sadly changed face.

"We must get her in bed," said Mrs. Ely, briefly.

"Yes," was the reply, with a glance towards the door. At a look from her mother, Mary closed it, and took Willie from the bed; and then those two women — as wide apart as the poles, in principles and position, yet drawn very near together by the sweet promptings of sisterly humanity — soon unrobed the sufferer, and lay her in bed, where in blessed unconsciousness of wrong or poverty, she must fight the terrible fight between life and death.

Not many moments elapsed before Dr. Jenness stood by the bedside. His looks were grave and anxious, as he marked each symptom, and questioned Mrs. Ely as to all she knew of what had happened.

"She must have most careful nursing, first of all," he said, as he watched the effect of the drops he let fall between her lips. "Shall you or I take care of that matter, Mrs. Ely?" Helen here replied:

"I will take charge of that part, Dr. Jenness."

He looked up quickly, pleased and surprised.

"I am glad to see you here, Mrs. Gleason."

"I am glad to be here; I am afraid my poor friend

has suffered greatly, but she must have lived very secluded, to have escaped my search so long."

"You know this poor lady well, then?"

"I do, indeed; we have been warm friends for many years."

Mrs. Gleason and Dr. Jenness had met before this, by beds of sickness and death. He knew her well, and she knew him for an actively humane man, but they felt themselves drawn nearer together by their mutual interest in the sufferer, who still lay motionless, as though the seal of death was already stamped on the white face.

Leaving minute directions to be observed, until he came again at night, the doctor left his patient to the tender care of her friend, who at once made preparations to remain. Her first act was to send for her husband, and then learn all Mrs. Ely chose to tell her about Margaret.

"She has been with me rather more than two years; her husband left her here when he went away; her baby was born here, and indeed, madame, I feel greatly attached to the pretty creature; she has been so patient under many trials, so sweet and unassuming in her ways, one could scarcely fail to love her."

"Her baby, you tell me, has been quite sick?"

"Yes, he barely lived through, and I suppose it was her untiring attendance on him, that broke the lady

down completely, though I suspect scanty nourishment, and unusual toil with her needle, had reduced the poor thing greatly, before broken rest and anxiety did the rest."

"My poor, poor Margaret! if I had but known," and tears fell like rain from the pitying eyes watching every line of the pallid countenance. After a little, Mrs. Gleason resumed. "From this time, I shall take all responsibility for my friend upon myself, and will pay you, at once, the amount she is indebted to you, as far as money can pay your goodness."

"You are honorable, Mrs. Gleason; I have no doubt Mrs. Evelyn would rather be indebted to you than to me, and I will not make any pretence of refusing the amount my due, but I beg you will believe, I should have taken care of her, had no other friend appeared."

"I am sure of it," returned Helen, warmly, "and it is but justice I should assume her debts, as well as the care of her; and now about the baby. What shall we do with him, until the fate of his mother is decided. It will not do to keep him in this room, of course," resumed Helen, after moistening the feverish lips through which a faint moan continually breathed. "I will provide a nurse, if you will furnish a room."

"I have been thinking what I could do," replied Mrs. Ely. "But I have not a room in the house unoccupied; even at present, I share mine with my two daughters."

"Then," answered Mrs. Gleason, "the child must be taken to my house, if he can be moved. I wish my husband would come. That must be him," she added, as the bell gave a loud peal.

Leaving her charge in care of the landlady, Mrs. Gleason went down to the parlor. Mr. Gleason met her with troubled looks.

"What is this, my darling? Richard tells me you have found a friend, very sick! Who is it?"

"You remember Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Surely!"

"Well, I saw her on the street, this morning, but the carriage was blocked, and before I could get to her, she had turned, and walked very rapidly up this street; I was unable to overtake her, but saw her enter this door, and before I could ring the bell, a servant ran screaming past me, and I found on entering, that Mrs. Evelyn had fallen in a faint, and she now lies in a most critical condition."

"She must be in a very reduced condition to lodge here," and Mr. Gleason cast his eyes about the room and its well-worn appointments.

"She is indeed pitifully reduced; she has been here since her return to the city, after the summer we spent in N——, you remember, Arthur, and she has a baby boy, who is just recovering from a severe illness."

"Well, dear, what do you propose to do? for of

course, you will see that she is cared for ; that she has a physician, nurse, and everything necessary for her comfort, and the baby, what shall we do with him ; let him remain here ? ”

“ Mrs. Ely has no room to keep for him,” answered Helen, who seemed to be revolving an important matter in her mind. “ I think we had better have him taken home at once, if it is prudent to move him, and provide a nurse for him there. But, Arthur,” and the wife slipped her hand through his arm, and laid her head against his shoulder in her own pretty way, “ I cannot leave my dear friend to a hired nurse, in her critical state ! ”

“ Helen ! what would you do ! surely not nurse her yourself ? ” he cried, turning startled eyes upon her.

“ Yes, dear, that is just what I must do, and you must not oppose me, but rather help and sustain me in the doing.”

“ But, my precious wife, think of the danger to yourself, and the loss to your little ones, to say nothing of your husband, should you take the disease, and sink under it ! There are plenty of good nurses, and I will provide one at once, two or three, if you like, but do not think of exposing your own life, so useful and precious, unnecessarily ! ”

“ It is not unnecessary, Arthur, but most important, that I remain here. I have thought of it in every light,

and my duty is clear ; I cannot leave that sorrowing, lonely woman up-stairs to the care of a hired nurse, who will minister only to the body, and that is not the most distressed part of my poor Margaret. I am in no danger ; I am in perfect health, my mind at peace, and you know I am a good nurse, at the same time I have such a reservoir of vitality to draw from, I can impart to the sufferer, through my love, strength she could not obtain otherwise. You know how firm I can be, dear, when I feel that I am right ; so do not oppose me, but help me rather, to go through with this simple act of humanity, and save a life just as precious and necessary to one helpless babe, as mine is to three."

"Very well, you wonderful little woman, my judgment tells me you are right, though my heart rebels ; tell me your wishes, and I will carry them out."

Helen gave minute directions about receiving the child at home, and procuring a nurse for him, some matters about her own wardrobe being sent her suitable for the sick room, and also for an assistant for herself.

"And the physician ? shall I send Dr. Chandler ?"

"No, I think not, Arthur, Dr. Jenness is attending her, and I have great faith in his skill and judgment, beside being one of the tenderest-hearted men in the world."

And so it was settled. It was decided that baby

Willie could be moved with proper care, and Mr. Gleason promised to come for him as soon as he could make arrangements. Willie had been removed to Mrs. Ely's room, and laid upon the bed, and every time the door opened, he would turn his large blue eyes wistfully on those entering, and then nestle back on his pillow, and neither speak nor smile, though he would take nourishment and medicine when offered him. In the afternoon Mr. Gleason came back with a nurse to fetch Willie. Mrs. Gleason went to see that the little one was well wrapped up from the cold. As she bent above him, he put up both bits of hands, and said, eagerly: "I want mamma, take me to mamma?"

The gentle lady gathered him to her bosom, while the tears started to her sensitive eyes.

"Mamma is sick, my precious, and cannot take Willie, won't you wait until mamma is better?"

"Yes, Willie will wait, but I want my sweet mamma," and he turned his face and hid it in the bosom on which he lay, though he did not shed a tear.

"He is a strange child," said Mrs. Ely, who stood by, "a most strange and loveable child, and seldom ever cries. You will never part with him, if his mother dies, will you, madame?" and the voice of this worldly woman actually faltered.

"I shall keep him, certainly," was the answer, "but I earnestly hope and pray we may save his own mother to him."

"I hope so, too, with all my heart."

Mrs. Gleason took her place by the invalid's bedside, and for many days and sleepless nights, she watched untiring the struggle of that frail body to hold the worn spirit. Dr. Jenness, too, was devoted, and though his skill may have subdued the fearful fever running riot through the purple veins, yet to the watchful care, the tender sympathetic care of her true friend, who constantly bathed the parched and heated flesh, stilled the throbbing head by the touch of her cool, magnetic hand, and kept a tempered light and heat in the fever-poisoned room. It seemed sometimes, too, that the sufferer was conscious of the whispered words of endearment, conscious too, of the loving offices performed, for the dark eyes would open on the watcher with an instant gleam of intelligence, and a shadow of a smile flit across the sad mouth, so long unused to smiles.

It was long, painful waiting both for Helen, and those who trembled for her welfare. She did not fear for herself, though not believing in blind chance, she took every precaution for her own health, consistent with her duties of a nurse. Dr. Jenness watched her keenly, and reported twice daily to Mr. Gleason, who, drawn this way and that, between his anxiety for the health of his idolized wife, and his humanity towards her friend, scarcely rested more than did Helen, in her

self-imposed labor. No self-centred egotist he, but a great-hearted man, yet he could not rest when he thought of her possible danger.

This fearful warfare between life and death could not go on many days, but must soon turn in favor of one or the other. After nearly two weeks anxious waiting, the friends stood with suspended breath watching the palid face, where the gray shadows were slowly gathering. Painfully the faint breath passed through the parted lips, so faintly and at such long intervals, that each seemed the last. The doctor himself quite despaired ; still he continued to moisten the drawn lips with a powerful mixture, while Helen, silent and almost unmoving, watched him from the other side of the bed.

"She is gone !" whispered Mrs. Ely, and indeed, it would seem so, for the drapery on the breast moved not, and the long lashes lay still on the wasted cheek. It must be death ! Mrs. Gleason questioned, with eager eyes, as Dr. Jenness raised himself from a stooping posture. He shook his head ; he could not trust himself to speak, this kindly-souled man. He was deeply affected, so interested he had become in his patient. He walked to the window, and put aside the curtain, then came back and again clasped the cold hand that lay on the coverlid, and watch in hand, listened again to the faint breathing, though the light

would not allow him to see the face of the watch. And just then the clang from a steeple near, gave stroke after stroke, twelve o'clock. Beckoning Mrs. Gleason, he again walked to the window.

"O, doctor! is there no hope? save her for her child's sake!"

Well did the lady know he was doing to the best of his ability, after consultation with the first physicians in the city, yet so apt are we to beg the doctor to do more, when only the giver of life, could will it to stay.

"I have *no* hope, Mrs. Gleason, but I have one more remedy, which, in one case in ninety-nine, may prove life-saving, but it is far more likely to prove a messenger of death. You are her nearest friend; shall I administer the drug, with a possible chance for life, or shall I let the disease take its course? I will do as you bid me, her life hangs in the balance."

"Give it to her!" was the unhesitating reply, and immediately from a tiny vial, the doctor dropped one drop of colorless liquid into a glass of water, and then put a little from a teaspoon between the invalid's lips. She slightly gasped, and the heavy lids lifted from her dark eyes, quivered an instant then sank, the tide of life rolled slowly back, as the sluggish blood that was still left, quickened in the thread-like veins.

"She will live!" breathed Helen, with the awe of a great presence in the whispered words.

Dr. Jenness answered only with a hopeful look, and again administered the subtle drug. A few intense moments, and the rigid outline of the limbs relaxed, the gray shadows of arrested circulation lifted, and the breath came regularly, though faint, from the bosom. Then the eyelids dropped easily, as natural slumber superceded the torpor, and the ghastly look faded from the drawn mouth.

The night wore slowly away, and still the invalid slept. From time to time the faithful watcher touched the lips with pure water, as with wakeful, hopeful love she waited the dawn. The doctor had gone home, Mrs. Ely to her bed, and only unseen company still lingered, a company that brought with its coming a blessing of peace that would ever be felt in that household.

Late in the following day, Margaret opened her eyes, the light of intelligence in their black depths. Helen was bending over her, and unable to speak at first, bent and kissed the pale mouth, round which a smile was trying to hover. To the look of pleased inquiry, she replied :

"You have been very, very sick, darling, but you are better now, and we hope will soon be well." Then as Mrs. Ely came in, bringing a tiny bowl of nourishment, Helen took it, indicating the bed with a glance.

"Ah!" and with real motherly interest, the woman leaned over and took the thin hand. "You are better, dear." Margaret did not attempt to reply, but the

ness, there will be a greater revolution in society than any civilized act has ever brought about. God speed the time, when children organized from a purer, truer source, will cease to be the helpless, unconscious instruments of reacted lust, murder, and all the wretched catalogue of crimes, that are stirring the world from centre to centre.

Lying there in her unspeaking convalescence, her brain gaining strength faster than her body, Margaret saw with clearer vision her relations with Allen Boyed. Her love had been as pure as anything most pure, as her love had been for her child, her mother, or her thoughts of heaven itself. True, she knew well, and shuddered at the thought, that she was outraging the social law, and that the world's approbrium would fall relentlessly, did it but know; though I am afraid the sometimes almost distracted creature believed, when she allowed herself to dwell upon the subject, that the divine meaning of the law was far more sadly outraged in her marriage, than in the baned estate in which she had lived for more than two years. Yet now she would sooner put her hand in the flame, than she would have returned to the bondage in which she had been held by Allen Boyed.

She read him aright at last, and the reading had divested him of the grand attributes in which he had appeared to her — when passion blinded — nearer a

God than man. She knew now, it was her wit, her brightness, her glowing health, and her fresh, undimmed beauty that held his senses in thrall. Instinctively she knew her goodness, her intellect, her purity even, had little weight with this man, who had grown satiated with the rich magnetism of her royal nature; he must have change, and preferred anything, if a stagnant pool, rather than the higher change her better nature could bring him. All this she saw, and more and more, with mind introverted, and the result was, that when she was able to dress and be moved to the luxurious home of her friend, her heart was as free from any lingering tenderness for Allen Boyed, as though it had never beat with a warmer emotion than friendliness. Better still, there was no resentment, no scorn, no anything like emotion. He had dropped as completely out of her life and thoughts even, as though he had never been, and had he appeared before her with all the old glamour of lovingness, I think she would have greeted him as indifferently as any being under the sun, without a single quickened pulse. It is possible that later, when health and interest in the world's affairs grow stronger, she may find that at times, and under some circumstances, the old pain may make itself felt, but however that may be, as life moves on towards new experience, every particle of friendship, respect or passion, has been swept from her heart forever.

Mrs. Gleason made everything in the way of settlement satisfactory to Mrs. Ely, the latter taking the furniture at her own value, Margaret wishing to be rid of it, and so escape all old associations. Dr. Jenness refused utterly to receive a fee.

"It is not the first time, madam, we have watched together by a sick bed; usually you have paid the bills, but this time, I insist on giving my services, since I was the first called."

Helen thanked him warmly with a kind pressure of the hand at parting. Well she knew it was not the first by many acts of unselfish charity performed by this good physician. He will have his reward.

It was like Paradise, coming from her ill-lighted, dingy room, to the high, sunny chamber adjoining Helen's, with the same long window opening into the conservatory, and another with the blinds flung wide to admit the morning brightness. A glowing coal fire burned in the grate, it was so cheerful, Helen said, to see as well as feel the warmth.

The curtains, carpet, as well as the coverings of the low easy chairs and lounge, were of a lovely rose-tint, relieved by a background of delicate gray. Margaret's own pictures had been transferred to the walls, and her own knick-knackerie brought and scattered about. From this exquisite sitting-room another opened, in which all the appointments for dressing could be seen,

and where a white bed stood invitingly ready for the convalescent.

"You must let me carry you," said Mr. Gleason, as Mrs. Evelyn made an effort to step from the carriage. A faint tinge came to her wan cheek, but she yielded to him as she did to every one, in these days. He carried her through the vestibule, and up the stairs, and as he did so, the furred hood fell back and exposed her face to other eyes that glanced up, as Mr. Gleason passed the library door. Mr. Vernon had of course taken a deep interest in his sister's friend, not perhaps so much the friend, as the result of her sickness to Helen herself. He was daily at the Gleasons to learn the progress of events, and here he had seen and become greatly interested in baby Willie.

"He is such a marvellous little fellow," he would say, "while he has all the lovingness of a child, he comprehends as quickly as a mature mind.

Percy had been waiting to see his sister, little dreaming he was to see the face of his beautiful unknown in that of his sister's guest, as she passed him, white and wasted, in the arms of his brother-in-law.

Percy's life had rounded into a most complete and beautiful manhood, since his late unravelling of the tangled web in which his young, pure love, his golden hopes, his boyish ambition, were woven into a black warp of lies, deceit and death; and since he had

learned one of the weavers was his mother, whom he had ever regarded as a queen among women, royally above temptation, the other, his dearest friend whom he had held as the soul of honor; and since he had proved beyond a doubt, his child-wife whom he had cursed to a woeful death, was pure, loving, and O, so wronged, he had forbade himself the privilege of judgment until every fact, the faintest coloring of fact, or the tiniest evidence that could bear upon the matter had been sifted and proved.

Then so merciful his judgments, so lenient to the weaknesses of his fellow-man was he, that his friends looked upon him and wondered, as once before men wondered and asked, "What manner of man is this?" I do not think he was called a charitable man. He never did anything towards building churches, or endowing colleges, or converting heathen, outside his own city; I doubt if he ever paid a dollar this way. Neither to take several score of ragged little wretches to a sail on the harbor, or to build lofty seats for them to see processions draggle through the streets; he did not believe money spent in that way, would do half the good it would, put in a few pair of shoes, or a basket of provisions, but then it happened to be his way of thinking; he might not be right, I only tell you what he thought about it. He well knew there were liberal men enough who would glory in this kind of a thing,

and whose ambition for committing big charities, — excuse the expression, — was only equal to their ambition to see their name blazoned as such men.

The finding of his child had opened the depths of his great, true heart, and while hitherto he had looked upon children as another of earth's blessings never to be his, now there was a silent outgo of tenderness for every child he met. For more than fifteen years, his lips had never touched the lips of woman, and they seemed to him a beautiful good, which the perfidy of one had rendered, not hateful, though that was the word that came into my mind, but distasteful is a better, a good which he felt no desire to appropriate. But since the purity of Gertrude had been made apparent, as well as his own weak credulity regarding her, he began to see that life, after all, was only a make-up of sad mistakes at the best, and the truest use to make of it, after finding oneself here, was to get all the good out of it possible, and not let the first failure at effort, discourage all other attempts.

Especially since meeting that wonderfully fair woman in the dingy paper office, had he resolved to make the most of whatever good came to him, and wherever he might find it. She seemed as out of place, it is true, as a rare jewel amid the pebbles of the street, but a gem might be dropped in the dirt under our feet, and remain a gem still; thus his faith in Mrs. Evelyn.

Now when he was made aware that his sister's friend, with whose history he had been made acquainted, and his beautiful unknown were the same, the inward unrest that marred his perfect peace, passed with his earnest aspiration of "Thank God."

A deep content had fallen over the spirit of Margaret when she left the house where she had sinned and suffered, but not until lain gently on the lounge in the pure atmosphere of this happy home, did some of the old brightness flash into her eyes.

"God is so good to me," she cried, twining her arms around Helen's neck. They were alone, these two. "He has let me go very near to a fearful gulf, only to show me his watchful, forgiving love, holding me back by the hand of an angel."

"Hush, hush, my darling! I am no angel," and she returned Margaret's kisses warmly. "I am only a steward, and properly rendering my account, is only doing my duty. See, here comes Willie!" and as the child was brought forward, he sprang with outstretched hands into the arms of his mother. "Be careful, Willie, mamma is very weak," continued Mrs. Gleason. He nestled beside her on the lounge, scanning the changed face eagerly, at the same time saying half doubtfully,—

"It is mamma, Aunt Helen."

"Yes, it is mamma, my precious," said Margaret, kissing the little hand caressing her lips. After a little,

the nurse wanted to take him, but he, without resisting in words, tightened his hold on his mother's hand.

"Let him stay," she begged, "he will not tire me, we will go to sleep together."

So Mrs. Gleason left them to go to sleep, while she nestled back into her old place in her household, from whence she had been absent for five weeks on an errand of mercy. Mother and child continued to gain surely. Willie was made a pet by the whole household, from the eldest to the youngest, servants as well. Mrs. Gleason took the responsibility of clothing him in dainty apparel, most becoming to his delicate beauty, and Margaret, feeling it would be affectation to refuse any good offered, after all that had gone by, accepted anything for her darling, but not for herself.

"No," she would reply to Mrs. Gleason's urgent entreaty that she would accept some fresh dresses, "No dear, I have enough to be comfortable, while I am an invalid, and until I am able to do something for myself, I will have nothing more."

It was during the long, idle hours of convalescence, that Margaret learned more of the inner life of her friend than she ever knew before, and she felt more forcibly than ever, what she had always felt, how her own life had wasted, for want of right directing. When she grew stronger, Helen lay before her the plan she had formed and never given up, since her brother had

first began to look for a companion for his daughter. Margaret listened, well pleased at the prospect of earning a home for herself and baby.

"If I can only prove myself a competent companion for the sweet child."

Margaret had heard the whole sadly romantic story, and had seen Ethel several times since coming to the Gleasons, and there was a mutual attraction between the sad-faced woman and the fresh young girl, who seemed to impart much of her own strong vitality to the invalid.

"O yes, dear, you are every way fitted for the position, if you will accept it. My brother will treat you as an honored guest, while you will be doing him inestimable service, for which he will pay you generously, and you will have a home worthy of you, my Princess."

A flash of the tear-bright eyes was all the answer she received, but Helen was well satisfied, and went out to see a guest who had called.

For the first time since her complete recovery, Mrs. Evelyn's countenance, when alone, expressed content. Not that it would, for a long time, if ever, lose that look of sadness, the remembrance her sinful mistake had left upon it. But the far-off troubled look, as though the mind was wandering in unsatisfactory speculations, had passed away. The assurance of a fair

competence earned by her own effort, and a home for herself with Willie, was the boundary to her present aspirations.

She knew that she was gifted with no particular genius to win fame or money; she was educated as women were educated in those days, when it was for no particular purpose. She was well read, and had kept fairly up with the times, and would no doubt have filled with satisfaction the position of teacher, that her friends might in time get her, but teaching would necessitate her leaving Willie to other care than her own. She was an excellent musician and a sweet singer. As the first she might become a teacher, though teaching of any kind would be a great drudgery to one of her organization; but her voice was not powerful enough to offer to the public. She was a correct and expressive reader, and had often charmed her friends with her exquisite talent, but she knew the long months of training demanded, and the money necessary to pay for such training, before she could hope to win a paying place. She had thought of the stage, and in fact, all the avenues to which a woman could then turn, and hope to secure an income above the pittance of daily toil. Margaret knew, since slowly returning life brought her back from the other shore, that she was friendless and moneyless no longer, but she was none the less anxious to help herself as soon as an opportu-

nity presented. Therefore when Helen proposed that she should accept the position of companion to Ethel, Margaret was delighted, though she never met Mr. Vernon, and Helen was delighted, for she believed it to be the exact place she could fill with satisfaction, for she knew if nature ever created a true home-goddess as wife, mother, and mistress, her model was embodied, though latent, in our Margaret. She was dwelling on her prospect of independence, when Helen returned, her face showing traces of tears, yet her bright eyes and smiling lips assured the questioner that they were not tears of grief.

"I am so happy," she said, "poor Edith has had a hard battle to fight, but I hope she has overcome the worst, and will now have a little rest; but you do not understand, dear, I will tell you. Do you remember Edith Linton, who attended Madame Barton's at the same time we did?" Mrs. Evelyn shook her head. "A slender black-haired girl, with a lily-white face, and the reddest lips, and those dark, gray eyes with a tinge of yellow in them, those shy kind of eyes that rarely look at you?"

"I do not remember," and Margaret looked thoughtful. "She could not have been in our classes."

"Yes she was, but she was a shy, quiet creature, an orphan and poor; her cousin and nearly her only relative, I believe, educated her with the intention of mak-

ing an actress of her, but she was met and courted by a young gentleman, handsome, bright, and in good business. I remember him well — ”

“So do I now,” interrupted Margaret, “and she married him before the term closed, did she not? though she remained, and none of us knew it until after she left.”

“The very one, but there was one who knew it. I went with her to the minister’s, and came back with her, and shared her confidence until she went West to join her husband two months after. It was necessary that he should go on a certain day, and Edith did not like to leave school, so they arranged the marriage, and he went on to make her a home ready, and she was to join him at the close of the term. She was obliged to break with her cousin, for he was terribly angry when he found she was married, and had thus frustrated all his hopes of her, and swore he would never see her again. Edith deeply regretted this rupture, for she was attached to her cousin, and grateful to him, but she could not be unhappy, for she loved her handsome husband with all her heart, and certainly her life began very promising. We wrote occasionally, and when I was married I sent a card, but never heard from her again, until some six months ago, I met her on the street, a shadow of my old classmate, white, wasted, and O, so sad, yet I knew her. She knew me too, but

would have passed me without speaking, had I not stopped her. I learned she was a widow and very poor, that was enough to learn then, and finding she would not go home with me, I insisted upon her going to dinner with me, for I believed food at that moment was the most important thing to talk about. She hesitated still, and glanced at her attire, which was rather worn and plain certainly, and she is fiercely proud, but I would not understand her hesitation, and after we were seated at a cosy dinner, I persuaded her to open her heart to me. O, Margie, it was such a pitiful story, and since hereafter I want you to aid her with the strength of your own true, gracious spirit, and as I intend you to be my other self in all I hope to do, I will tell her story to you, if you will accept it under such conditions."

"With all my heart, dear Helen. If you can make any use of me in any way, so that I may repay to another a tithe of what I owe you, I shall be most happy."

Mrs. Gleason turned from the window where she was standing—for she had not sat down since she entered—and caressed the abundant dark hair for a moment or two, before answering:

"My precious friend, do I not know your own life has been steeped in bitterness; I was not blind all those years, though you bore your lot in brave silence,

and do I not know also, that the surest help for our own sorrows, is in helping others?"

Mrs. Evelyn made no reply, save to draw the caressing hand to her lips. Then Mrs. Gleason, taking a seat, told what she had gathered of Edith Riply's circumstances.

"It seems that Mr. Riply was a prosperous merchant, with quite a fine property, which he had accumulated, for though still under thirty, when he was married, he was a dozen years older than his wife. She was very happy at first, for he was kind, and most indulgent to her, supplying all her wants with lavish hand, for he was generous as a prince, and from first to last, loving her dearly; but, alas! that it should be said, from first to last, loving the wine cup. So true it is, that a perfect character is more rare than a perfect diamond, and though Mr. Riply was a very fine character, this one terrible flaw was his ruin. The poor young wife found that between business of the day and wine and billiards in the evening, her portion of her husband's time was mostly when he was asleep. It was a terrible cross to bear, for Edith was high-spirited and sensitive, and came from a race of men and women who had never borne disgrace of any kind — unless we do as the world does — except poverty.

She withdrew entirely from society, and lived in the seclusion of her home, devoting all her time to the care

of her little ones, of whom she had several. Finally, Mr. Riply returned to New England, and for the last ten years, has been doing business in this city, and living in an adjoining town. They lived in quiet affluence, but the dreadful skeleton that was not always hidden, as the years went on, robbed poor Edith of all the old yielding sweetness of character that made her so attractive as a girl, and gave place to proud reticence, that kept her aloof from old friends, and prevented her making new ones, except rarely. Her children died one after another, until only two were left, and to these she clung with a silent and despairing fondness, that we often see in such rich natures, whose right of loving is narrowed to so small a compass. Many years before this period, every affectionate emotion for her husband had died out, and though she did not detest him, the feeling that was predominant was almost as dangerous for her peace, it was that of utter indifference. She simply endured him and life, and dead to hope or ambition, save always for her two pretty boys. Think, dear Margie, of living such a life, year after year. Some half dozen years ago, her husband sickened, or I should say, his health began slowly to give way, and none but herself knew of the sleepless vigils night after night his querulous exactions required, and her sense of duty gave. I will not call it duty altogether, it is more a part of the inward im-



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pulses of every woman, developed to a greater or less degree, that will not allow her to forsake or neglect anything helpless left to her care.

"This was the beginning. General stagnation of business followed, two or three failures, and a destructive fire, failed the firm of Gordon & Riply, and left them penniless. Edith had no reason to fight against stagnant misery after this. Her husband sunk under the combined misfortunes that swept away his last dollar, and a stroke of paralysis left him as helpless, and at times witless, as a child. He lived more than a year after this, and in the same helpless condition, and his wife, all unused to labor of any kind, worked for him, and cared for him as tenderly as for a babe on her bosom. Well, after all had been done, and the grave closed over the erring man, another victim to the fearful scourge of our land, Edith found herself without means, and with no experience in anything that would pay, same as many others had done before, with two helpless children. Beside her poverty and general unfitness for business, Mrs. Riply had a greater misfortune to contend with, which finally drove her away from the place where she had lived so long, and where had the people possessed a little more humanity, she might have found enough to do, to have given herself and children a home.

"I told you she was proud and uncommonly sensitive;

well, her peculiar circumstances had fostered this disposition to resent quickly and fiercely any imputation on her integrity, and these unhappy attributes were called into play often since her necessities had made her in a way the property of the public, and every gossip felt they had a right to slaver her with whatever venom they had to spit."

"But what could they find to say of one whose every hour of life must have been filled with care and unending labor? one would have supposed her misfortune would have thrown a very sacredness around her, instead of exposing her more and more."

"It is difficult to tell. There were a few who knew her the best, who believed in her fully. The physician who was as faithful and humane to the poor family as he was pure in his life and character, and assisted them in many ways, and always remained a true friend; then there was a lodge composed of good, true men, who without ostentation helped them in various ways, nor ceased their kindly efforts while Edith remained in town, and they have only good words for the burdened creature. But it was the women, I am grieved and ashamed to say, who without saying anything in particular, nearly drove the woman to suicide. As I said before, it is difficult to tell how such matters start; you know how it is in a village, as soon as the faintest whisper of blame is breathed about one. I believe this

was first started by the jealous ravings of a woman whose husband did some neighborly kindness for Mr. Riply, then it was talked about in different families by one of those pests of the neighborhood, I mean a gossiping family sempstress, and this particular one had been saved, with her family of little children, from cold and hunger many times by the help of the Riplys. Well, these revilings were gathered up, worked over, and then scattered abroad in choice bits, to spice the otherwise stale hundraum of village life. By and by, one of those fossil-like women, who has lived in such perfect propriety all her life, that she must needs have the sins of other less fortunate human beings to feed upon, in order to retain her centre of gravity earthward, said to some other equally good creature, all in sacred confidence, you understand, that she was afraid Mrs. Riply was a light woman. Immediately, this other perfect woman, who by the way was a clergyman's wife, having herself a reputation of great piety, consequently great influence in the place, told it to some other good creature, that it was known without a doubt that Mrs. Riply was not worthy. Well, this was enough, nearly all the women in town flew into arms against her. They knew nothing in particular, except she was said to be very fascinating, which under her peculiar circumstances, was a crime.

She was certainly very pretty, though fragile and

colorless as moonbeams. No one felt any dislike or rancor towards this quiet, unobtrusive woman, who never had much to say, now less than ever; but then, if they did not feel a rush of indignation, they must feign it, or they might be supposed to be in sympathy with a possible naughtiness, so they must grimace to respectability, though they bruised a sore, tired heart to do it. Hang respectability of our day, the old fraud, flaunting a fair exterior over a rotten, bloated carcass, while true respectability dethroned, dishonored, lives only in the *hearts* of the minority. Not until there has enough been driven through the fiery furnace of discipline, to make an army of resistance, will she be restored to her rightful place in the world, and the sham that has so many followers in these days, exposed in all her deformity. The trouble is, subjects for such discipline, like poor Edith, are generally taken singly, and grow so cowardly with pain, they are glad to slink away into the first refuge that offers, nor care to fight alone so profitless a fight."

Mrs. Evelyn was listening, intensely interested in this story of every-day occurrence, but more interested in this new phase of her friend's inner self. Here were the deeps in that sunny, placid nature, that discovered the source of power that had often startled and puzzled her friends.

"Are you interested in Mrs. Riply, Margie?"

"O, yes indeed, most profoundly so, but did she tell you all this story herself?"

"No, she gave me the bare outline, blaming no one, and uttering no complaint, and only told me of her anxiety to do something to help herself. I have acquaintances in W——, Edith's former home; they were warmly attached to her, and from them I learned the story I have told to you. After we had our dinner, I persuaded Mrs. Riply to let me go home with her. The highest room in a dingy old tenement, made barely inhabitable by a little black stove, and most poorly and shabbily furnished, was the place she was able to rent for the pittance she could afford to pay. Her children, two bright boys, were there, and sitting down with an arm around each, she told me what she had tried to do. She had tried to secure a home for her boys in some charitable institution, for a month or two, until she could earn something, because she had no money to pay their board at the present time. She went to the Children's Mission. They at first told her they were full, adding, if they were not they could not take her children, as by so doing, they might keep out some poorer child."

"You could scarcely find poorer children," said Edith.

"O, yes, we have many children who have no mother, or have mothers who could not possibly earn what you can if you try."

"I cannot find any work to take home, and I cannot go out to work unless I can find a home for my children," and Edith thought, with almost envy, of the strong-handed washwomen, who made themselves comfortable, while their children were warmly housed and fed in this place.

"Well, you must put your children to board, and go to work," the man replied to her last remark.

"But I cannot earn enough to pay the board that is charged for children; I have nothing yet to do, and I do not know that I can more than pay my own board at present."

"Well," he said, rising, "you ought to be able to take care of them and yourself too, handsomely."

"I hope to, when I have once made a beginning, but I have not yet been able to get any work." Edith rose to go.

"Well, this is a mission for poor orphan children only, we cannot take those who have parents well and able to work."

Edith did not reply, she was too indignant at the injustice of his remark, but she must not be discouraged. She went to two other institutions said to be gotten up and supported for the benefit of poor children. In one they had the measles, in the other they did not take boys. Then she went to the last and only place she knew except the almshouse, that was the farm school.

Here the objection was that her husband was not a resident of the city. The school in question was for the benefit of widows, whose husbands had resided in the city. The superintendent would take the boys, or one of them at least, but she must pay a certain amount in advance, for board ; an impossible thing to do. It was returning from this last fruitless effort that I met her. She was thoroughly discouraged ; she had not a dozen dollars in the world. You know what a severe winter we have had, and I shudder when I think of the consequences to this strangely organized creature."

"What particular temptation do you think would have weight with her," inquired Mrs. Evelyn, intent on reading Mrs. Gleason's bias, as well as learning her answer.

"To none of an ordinary kind, assuredly, but I think her necessities would have hurried her to murder and suicide. She is most exquisitely sensitive to touch and feeling. I understood her better than any other, when we were at Madame Burton's, and I remember it was the rarest thing for her to kiss, unless she loved dearly, even the ordinary handshake was disagreeable to her, with exceptions ; and judging alone from temperament, and what I knew of her as a girl, and all that I have observed this winter, I think she holds her person so sacred, that she would burn it sooner than defile it."

"Poor Edith, this world has no place for such as she ;

but tell me how you have been able to help her? for of course I know you have done that."

"She is well educated, as women were educated at schools ten or fifteen years ago, but as for that education which comes of personal contact, much prolonged with highly educated people, she is not educated. There is a pure soul, a sensitive brain, a quick intelligence, and a heart that would have taken the higher culture like the rose. But each sigh of the soul was drowned in a babble of common people, and the sensitive brain took its impressions at second-hand, from books alone, and the quick intelligence was clouded in forced companionship with dullards; and the heart that a little training would have taught to hush its beatings, to wait for the word of God, was warped and disfigured by those it despised, yet still accepted, as the caged bird accepts the vile breath of the house, only because it cannot breathe its native air. Thus you see how few places outside the retirement of her own home, are fitted for her, or rather how unfit she is for nearly all employments under the sun. However, I would not allow her to get discouraged, and when I came to think of it, she was precisely the person I wanted, to help me about a matter I had greatly at heart. First, we had the boys put to a good school, a short distance from the city, in care of a kindly old couple I have known for many years, and who charged no more for their board, than

the mother could earn and pay easily ; thus she was left free to do whatever work came in her way."

"But you have not yet told me what business your protégé is engaged in."

Mrs. Gleason had been for some moments looking into the sympathetic face of her friend in silence, but evidently her thoughts were not on the subject just discussed, or rather they were taking in a wider range, for she did not answer at once. Finally she said :

"You remember, Margie, that I have mentioned a lodge to which I belong, composed entirely of women, organized half a dozen years ago, for the sole purpose of elevating and improving women generally ?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will tell you now more fully the purpose of the lodge, what it has done, and what it hopes to do. In order to become a member of this lodge, a woman must be pure in her life, and of fair record. By this I do not mean one who has never been censured, but one to whom no wilful fault or crime can be brought home. A woman who joins must pay a certain sum, and have the privilege of advancing any new idea, and have it discussed, and shall have the privilege of speaking at any time, on any subject, providing the floor is not occupied by others, or other business. Then we have what we call the workers, all taken from our ranks, who do the work that is planned in the lodge, and are

paid for their time from the funds. Then to those who are mistress of a house—for we meet always in the parlors of some member—they are paid for the trouble, unless they choose to give the use of their homes for half a day, and we have members who frequently do that. So much for the money affairs. We have certain laws, and to these laws every one must subscribe before becoming a member. Our obligations to each other are: Never to let a member or a member's child under sixteen, suffer from want or care. That no one shall repeat or speak a word of scandal against any woman at any time, but that every member shall defend every other at all proper opportunities, and each person must decide for herself when those opportunities are proper. Some of our work is this; to seek out from schools, factories, shops, and wherever we can find them, intelligent, ambitious girls, without parents generally though not always, and send them to school for a definite purpose. Educate them to do some kind of work or business that will enable them to support themselves in honor and self-respect without the wearing toil that robs a woman's existence of half its brightness. I could point out to you fifty bright, enterprising young women, cultured and mannered to adorn any station, going about their business or work daily, and living decently in homes which the society has built up for laboring women. They are able to save some-

thing every month, and are in a fair way to competence. Every one of these girls are parentless, and without our aid would have spent their young lives in the shop or factory, and later, a worn-out incompetent wife and mother ; who accepted marriage as a mere refuge from which they would nine times in ten, fly, if it were possible. We send girls to all parts of the country wherever we can get anything for them to do, and thoroughly competent girls always find work. It is the unambitious, the indolent, and half-informed who keep the wages at starvation standards. I wish they were the only sufferers."

"But, dear Helen, don't you ever meet with ingratitude, and don't you sometimes find that you have been assisting those who, after all your help, prove to be weak, or indolent, or both?"

"Yes, sometimes, though rarely. A few months will usually disclose the natural inclinations, and if we find we have made a mistake and cannot overcome a natural indolence or ungratefulness, we do the best we can with them, but it is only on the bright and really persevering that we spend much time or money, leaving the less gifted to the philanthropists. We generally find more trouble with the girls we train for servants."

"Have you a training school for that class also?"

"Yes. In the Home for working women, the culinary

department is conducted by a competent woman, assisted by a corps of girls, who through us are placed under her care, and taught all the different branches of housework, cooking, sweeping, dusting, washing windows, setting tables, washing, ironing, and in fact, the work as carried on in a well-conducted household ; for the Home is kept in perfect order, and the food though plain, is abundant, and very nicely cooked. The girls who go there, serve six months for their board simply, and in that time, are not only taught to cook food, but to buy it in its crude state, so that one of the most essential elements towards prosperity, that is economy, is taught with the handicraft. If they serve their time faithfully, we see that they are comfortably and decently dressed when they go to a situation, and never abate our interest in them, no matter in what town or city they may find a home.

“ Another part of our work isto hunt out just such women as Mrs. Riply, and aid them to help themselves. I tell you, dear Margie, it is the least little help, and the warm, true, human sympathy that most poor, sorrowing toilers want, to lift them to a region of self-help. Energy, ambition, and self-respect follow then as a sequence. Edith earns enough to support her boys, and keeps for herself a pleasant room, and is looking forward, a few months hence, when she hopes to have them with her in a home of her own, and earned by herself.”

"You have not told me what business she is engaged in. I am quite curious to know."

"Well, she canvasses for a book, but she attends to our business also ; looking after women, young girls and children, who she thinks would be grateful for our help, and finding out in a quiet, unobtrusive way, all the things that are to be known about them ; giving us the information, and leaving the Lodge to use it as it thinks proper. We pay her a salary quite remunerative for her services, and she earns something at what alone seems to be her business."

"But I should think you could find plenty of objects for charity, without much effort ; we cannot step upon the street without meeting with one or more, sick, maimed, and starving."

"Very true, but city missions, private institutions, farm schools, and what not, will take care of them. And when the poor wretches have been left to their own evil inclinations and temptations long enough, there is the almshouse, house of correction, and prison. I do not say that I would turn a half-starved, half-frozen beggar from my door unrelieved, when he came, but I do say, if I am to make an effort to lift a child to a better estate, I prefer one whose parentage was above the beast in brains, and whose organization had not been vitiated through generations of imbruted lives. Then we may hope to give from out our hands a

woman worthy the care and expense we have spent upon her.

“Standing healthful and independent, our girls will not care to rush into matrimony without due consideration, consequently we shall have less and less of those hasty, unholy marriages brought about too often by lust on one side, and a hope of support on the other. Do not misunderstand me. I do not hold to defying the law of marriage, or any other law, I believe in upholding law and order. Neither do I believe in abolishing the law of marriage. God forbid! But I believe in changing it, so that it can be honored in spirit as well as in letter, and not be outraged in both as it often is at the present day. It was well enough, perhaps, when it was framed, for the people for whom it was framed, for the clime and the age; but we have outlived it, and while men and women are allowed, nay, induced by every allurements under heaven to enter its relations, without consideration of age, or fitness of disposition, condition of health or ability of supporting it, while every facility, I say, is furnished for taking up this relation to gratify, O, any whim of the moment, I believe it should be allowed to unhinge as readily, especially when the relation has become intolerable, and every crime in the calendar is dared, to be rid of it. Its votaries will chant me the same old song. Young men and women should not enter this sacred

relation without due consideration, and be certain they know their own mind on this subject.

“What folly! just as though when passion held youth and inexperience in bondage, there is ever power for consideration, or just as though the mind on this subject would remain unchanged—if causes should arise to change it—any more than on any other. Of course I know that if the marriage law be changed, there must be a revolution in many, very many laws and customs of the present day. Very well. So there might be to the benefit of the whole civilized race, especially those yet unborn.

“When it shall be looked upon as a crime to become parents without means, or a disposition to get means to rear the offspring of love, pleasure, lust, or whatever the emotion that creates the helpless thing; when it shall be looked upon as a crime to become parents when there is a perpetuating taint of disease or insanity in the blood, and when it shall be considered a crime, by no means the least of the three, for a woman to bear children to a man she detests, there will be far less need of criminal lawyers, doctors, and institutions for punishment. But you see, my Margaret, we have not the law upon our side, therefore let us train our girls to understand themselves better, estimate themselves at their true worth, give them independence and health,—they are the firmest friends they can have—and

they will not yield so readily to the innate craving of their womanly natures for being loved, because their minds are filled with other interesting and important matter, which, while it does not render them a whit less loving or endearing, will give them a dignity and balance that utterly dependent women never acquire."

With all her heart Mrs. Evelyn could endorse everything Mrs. Gleason had said, and by her close attention, showed the fullest sympathy. She could have said, all this is known to me by bitter experience, and every word you speak has a vivid meaning to me, that you can only theorize; but she did not, the time for her to speak had not come yet, if it ever should.



CHAPTER XIX.

BEGINNING ANEW.

"But teach me, O Omnipotent, since strife,
Sorrow, and pain are but occurrences
Of that condition through which flows my life,
Not part of me, the immortal, whom distress
Cannot retain, to vex not thought for these;
But to be patient, bear, forbear, restrain,
And hold my spirit pure above my pain.
No star that looks through life's dark lattices,
But gives token of a world elsewhere."

— OWEN MEREDITH.



HE first use Margaret made of her strength was to go by herself, and return the money to her unknown benefactor. She wrote an earnest, womanly letter, thanking him for his faith in human nature, and begging him to continue in his kindly deeds, and so, perhaps, save a struggling soul from despair. This done, and never expecting to hear from him again, she made preparations to take up her new life, casting off the old, as something out from which she had grown, strengthened and renewed as by a new birth; but like all births, whether of thought, truth, empire, or individual, it was not accomplished without throes of agony. During her long, slow convalescence, she would lay for hours with her eyes closed, feigning sleep, that she might live over her past undis-

turbed. nor pain her loving friend by what might seem an ungrateful sorrow ; nor yet force herself from this wasteful mood to cheerful converse, until she should outlive it, and strength should come to her aid, and health and reason return together, forgetful that the slow cure of mind retarded the body's health.

For the young girl of her early marriage, she felt the profoundest pity. Not only pity for her compulsory union and its entailed horrors, but pity for the wasted years in which, had she known how, she might have done so much good to some — if not more wretched, wretched in a different degree ; pity for the aspirations that died with the desire that gave them birth, pity for the dim glimpses of better things that faded without fruition. But for the mature woman who had poured out the richness of her soul, made a prodigal waste of her womanhood before an idol of clay, who had burned the incense of her best feelings to an impostor, an outlaw to honor, to truth, and divinest manhood. For this woman she could feel only scorn ; scorn that she could so love this changling to whom the most sacred oaths were nothing when they clashed with desire ; to whom agreements were nothing, though written on the fair pages of a spotless life, written with the red drops of a true heart, and sealed with the honor of a loving woman. It was weakness to make so great and vital a mistake, to yield such homage to a man without soul,

however beautiful; but it was contemptible drivelling still to cling however slightly, to him, and feel her heart-strings draw and snap whenever his loss recurred to her.

I do not think Mrs. Evelyn ever even blamed, much less cursed Allen Boyed. It never occurred to her it was the most natural thing to do. She knew now her eyes were open — that he had played the part of a villain from the summer of long ago, when he had used every art of which he knew, to win her, down to the time of leaving his child breadless and moneyless, in mid-winter; yet for all this, she did not blame him; he was what he was, he had been her bane, but also she had loved him, she had given him her all of faith and hope, she could not take back her gifts, they would die out by and by, and with them die all that made life richest, rarely if ever to spring again this side of spirit culture. She found peace at last, and when finally she arose from her bed, restored once more to sound bodily health, her inward estimate of the world was not more changed than her outward appearing.

The perfect oval of her face had lengthened, and the tint of a ripe peach that had always lain upon her cheeks given place to a snowy white. Her abundant sloe-black hair, which Helen had barely been able to save from Mrs. Ely's shears, had fallen, and fine soft clusters of curls replaced it. Her beautiful eyes were

not less beautiful, but changed. The old fire and sparkle had died out, and in place of these a deprecatory brooding expression, as though pleading for lenient judgment. But it was in no one feature, it was the whole face. There were no lines, no white threads to tell of decay, but the woman's soul looked out changed. The human passions, hate, disappointment, love, jealousy, grief, self-contempt and despair had held high carnival in that helpless soul, had had their day, been defeated and driven out finally, and now a calm of determined effort to do the work the world held for her to do, little of hope for herself certainly, but a divine patience to bear to the end faithfully and sweetly every burden, looking for no reward, only by long endeavor to wear out the scars left by the soul's convulsions.

All arrangements had been made for her removal, and Mr. Vernon was more impatient than he dared to show, to have her an inmate of his house. Could he have carried out his most earnest desire, he would have offered the position of mistress of his elegant home to this frail, dependent woman, who all unconscious to herself, had inspired him with a most royal love for her, and he who had thought himself dead to the charms of woman, felt all the glow and thrill of a boy when in the presence of this fragile creature. I have told you Margaret had fully recovered her health

of body and mind, but the rich glory of her tropic beauty had forever departed. She did not often join in conversation, indeed, she was seldom seen except by the immediate family, and Percy doubted seriously whether she really knew his face or not, doubted whether if she should meet him outside his sister's house, she would know him. He found it quite difficult to approach her on the most common-place subjects, and though she accepted cordially the position in his house offered her, she manifested no desire to cultivate the acquaintance of the master, or win his attention in the smallest degree; and this subtle reserve, so delicate, yet high and deep as a granite wall to a fine soul, held him aloof, and warned him not to demolish the silvery castle hope was building, by being too precipitate.

I question—for we are wonderfully wayward in our moods—whether Mr. Vernon, if he had met our Margaret in the full radiance of her beauty, and at her best, would have more than admired this marvellous mechanism of divinity, nor had a wish to appropriate her, but his first glimpse of her had been from a most unfavorable point, a woman in a most questionable place, according to the ready judgment of the world, and further knowledge developing the facts of her utter poverty, her condition so helpless aroused from the first a sweet pity, a protective tenderness in his

God-like nature, a tenderness we always find in those great-hearted men, especially those who have suffered, and have seen suffering, and understand the cause to be as often weakness as viciousness. After that, he came to know her better through his sister, her charming girlhood, her successful society career, her humiliating and unhappy married life—learned only through observation, not from any complaint of her own—and her subsequent retirement, and short, though bitter struggle with poverty. This was what he had learned about her—apparently all her most intimate friends knew about her—and yet, he knew that far down in the deepest deeps of her selfhood there were secret woes, sins perhaps that she shared with none save Him who could console and pardon her. What they were he did not know, he only knew however great had been her sorrow, however great had been her error, he loved her, and longed to take her into his protection as he would any helpless, tortured thing that needed his care. But when he came to study the perfect face, read the lines of a thoughtful, serious character, the sweet mouth where rested the marks of inborn goodness and strength to practice it, the clear eyes that had learned the meaning of tears, and the low, sincere voice that soothed you with a sense of trust, all, all led him day by day to the true conclusion, that however this soul had touched the world's grim, its divinity instead

of receiving a stain, had changed the foulness into light, had made it an element of culture to itself; as the fairest of all blossoms, the white water-lily, receives its nourishment from the filth and slime of bogs, yet retains its innate purity. He understood her better than almost any other, though he had seen so little of her. Not a brilliant woman, or a woman of genius, but a loving womanly woman, full of all gentle qualities that make homes happy, and possessing those attributes that would render society far more healthful were they more common.

Satisfied of the perfectness of Margaret's character, he would, I repeat, have made her the mistress of his home, but that he knew it was too soon to speak. He knew she had never thought of him, except as Helen's brother, and an abrupt proposal would startle her into a refusal. No, she was a woman to be wooed, in order to be won. So used was she to the most delicate gallantry — as such women always command from even coarse-fibred men — that unless a lover made himself understood as such unmistakably, she would class his attentions as gallantry, simply. There was no danger, therefore, of her suspecting Mr. Vernon's regard for herself until he was quite ready to make it apparent. Beside, she was so intent on accomplishing two objects, that all others just now, seemed subordinate to them. First, to fill the position offered her with conscious

satisfaction, and satisfaction to both father and daughter, and to the utmost benefit to the latter. Second, to so train her beautiful boy, that the second sad mistake of her hitherto useless existence might not leave a taint, or bring misfortune to another; but rather that the child, by the good he could become in the world, might redeem his mother's error, as she by suffering expiated her crime.

She had learned to love Ethel very dearly. So affectionate the girl, that she satisfied her cravings for love from her own sex; so womanly was the girl, that she found in her pretty maturity, a charming companionship; while Percy, perfect in the delicate well-bred courtesy that men of the world pay to all women alike, made her at home the moment she entered the portal of his house.

Another fortunate event as it proved for her, Mr. Vernon's house-keeper was a very superior woman, a widow of a clergyman once resident of Margaret's native village, and quite intimate with her family; a lady who had loved her as a girl, and who was now happy to welcome her into so pleasant a home. Now, having told you the position of my most important actors, I will go on with my story.

It was nearly a month after the new family arrangements had settled into order, when one morning at breakfast—which was made as it should be, one of the

most delightful reunions of the day—that Helen came in bright, sweet, and full of her cheery self.

“Come, good people,” she cried, “pack your breakfast into the carriage, and join us in a pic-nic to the Cliffs, this beautiful day.”

Percy gave her a seat at the table, and Mrs. Emery passed her a cup of coffee, while Mrs. Evelyn helped her to a muffin, and Ethel attempted to remove her hat.

“No, dear, let it remain, I will drink my coffee, for I have not been to breakfast, I left the family enjoying that, while I came to let you know of our impromptu pic-nic.”

“Why did n’t you let us know last night?”

“Why? I did not know it myself, until half an hour ago. The Jordans sent over to know if we would go, and of course we would, and I answered for you!”

“Very good of you,” answered Percy, laughing, “how did you know we could or would go?”

“Go! of course you would. The Churchills and Boyeds and one or two other pleasant families are going. It was a start, I believe, of Mrs. Boyed, she leads, you know in all such delightful little gatherings, and she sent most special invitation for your family. By the way, Percy, have n’t I heard you say you knew Mrs. Boyed in Paris?” Helen had detected the faintest possible shadow on her brother’s face at the mention of the last name.

"Yes, I knew her there, though I have never met her since her return. Allen Boyed was present at my marriage with Gertrude."

"Indeed! have you met him since your return?"

"Yes, often, a very successful man he has proved."

"Yes, so the world names him." Then they went on talking about the pic-nic, making no more mention of the principal mover, though it was evident to Helen, that Percy had not spoken all that was in his mind about her, nor would he even to those nearest to him, for he was no gossip. Neither was Mr. Boyed a favorite with Helen, though she knew not why she should rather dislike him than otherwise, but she did.

"Well, it is decided that you will meet us at the Ferry, at half past eight," and Mrs. Gleason arose and gathered her mantle around her.

"Why, that will give us less than an hour," said Mr. Vernon, looking at his watch. "The ladies must dress —"

"Nonsense, they can dress, while you order round the horses, and have a basket packed. I am going dressed just as I am."

"Most becomingly, too," returned Mrs. Evelyn. So she was, in an airy material, the prevailing tint of which was blue. She ran away with the injunction, "Not to miss the boat!"

Ethel's rose-colored muslin with its delicate frills of

lace, it had been decided could not be improved, when a wide-brimmed hat was added, so she went with her father to attend to the luncheon.

Once in her own room, Mrs. Evelyn chided herself, silently, while her nimble fingers arranged a suitable toilet. "Shame upon me to let the thought of that man set the blood tingling to my very finger tips, and my heart beating to suffocation. Avoid him? indeed I will not; I cannot always, and it is a part of my punishment to meet him and his wife. When I have grown to meet him without emotion, when I can think of him as of the most indifferent person I know, I shall take it as a sign my expiation is complete." She received the assurance sooner than she had hoped.

It was a delightfully bright day, and the parties assembled were nearly all old acquaintances, the only new comer being Mrs. Boyed, and she bearing prestige of most unexceptional kind. Margaret was welcomed with open arms as a "recovered treasure," some one playfully remarked, and to her content she found herself greeting Allen Boyed without a tremor, but on the contrary with a feeling of most supreme indifference, or rather with that kind of indifference with which we meet one who has not and cannot have the slightest interest for us. Not so her feeling towards his wife. She did have some curiosity concerning one who held such power over the hearts of men and

woman, and was sorry to meet a repulsion. For the first time in her life she positively disliked a woman at the first meeting, and shrank from her as from a harmful thing. But instantly she perceived it was Mrs. Boyed's fault; she was aggressive, she not only boldly uncovered her own true soul to the startled woman, and claimed her antagonism, and defied her, but as Margaret met the cold glitter of those small blue eyes, half hidden in the long, thick lashes, she said inwardly, "My secret is mine no longer, the craven has betrayed me to his wife." With the same thought, a delicious peace settled over her, and she fancied a vibration on the air that breathed an assured protection from her malice.

The introduction and soul-reading passed far more quickly than it has taken me to relate it, and those near saw only the courteous greeting of two well-bred people who were pleased to meet. Later, Mrs. Evelyn remarked a great change in Mr. Boyed. He had grown thin, his delicate-featured face was pinched, almost, and his fine eyes sunken, and he appeared harrassed, in place of the polished quietude that once marked his bearing. Margaret noticed, though she did not give the fact much thought at the time.

Altogether, the gathering was a decided success, as those simple parties usually are, and the design of the projector accomplished, that was to bring her husband

and Mrs. Evelyn face to face, and herself into more intimate relation with the Gleasons and Vernons, than she had hitherto been able to do; and yet the accomplishment had not brought her much satisfaction. Her acute perception had no difficulty in apprehending two facts, not very soothing to her self-love. First, that with all her supposed power over her husband, — so great that she had been able to pick the veriest secret of his life from its hiding-place — with all her supposed power, his very being still knelt in reverence before this pale, quiet woman, who had risen so out of his reach, that in all time she could never stoop to him again. Second, that Percy Vernon was as impervious to her subtlety, as when she lowered her woman's crest to woo him in Paris. However, she hid her chagrin under her perfect society air, and cooed over Helen and Margaret, petted the children — until clear-seeing Ethel wondered why she did it — and she made herself so charming generally, that her enchantress crown was greener than ever.

From this day's gipsying on the cliffs, there came to be a constant interchange of courtesies between the Boyeds and Vernons, through a liking of the Gleason family, and especially Mrs. Casā, and a few others who were intimate with both. The way matters were drifting did not please Mr. Vernon. He knew this woman never made an exertion unless for a purpose, she kept

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her wonderful powers to do her work, nor wasted them on trivial occasions that gave her no return, and he knew she had a purpose in the more than common civilities she lavished on those immediately around him. The elegant little entertainments she originated — for she was too well skilled in such things to crowd many or all kinds of people together — were never complete without his presence ; and of course, Mrs. Evelyn was never slighted, that would not do — yet, or Mrs. Boyed would not be enabled to make the unceremonious calls she frequently did when Percy was sure to be at home, when her rare wit would gleam and scintillate like the flash of gems, for an hour, and then she would sweep away just at the right moment, leaving the happiest impression of her brilliancy. He did not understand her purpose because he did not appropriate her design to himself, and though he disliked her influence, as the influence of all such organizations — when unbalanced by high principles — is more or less hurtful, still he could not well see how he was to avoid her, without making his avoidance marked. Of all he had known of her, baleful effects had followed her appearance, wreck and ruin of more than one human soul lay to her charge, and though her arts had fallen powerless on him, he believed now it was a strength other than his own that saved him.

He often wondered what impression this strange

creature made upon Mrs. Evelyn; he pondered and observed, but she was as reticent as himself, and he could not look beyond the perfect unapproachableness that always enveloped her, though it was of the faintest transparency; but he saw with satisfaction the charmer could not penetrate this subtle aura, and Margaret was, therefore, impervious to harm, supposing she was the object, which, however, Percy did not at first suspect. You see he had not dreamed the fact that her glittering eye had detected his devotedness to Mrs. Evelyn, carefully as it was veiled, nor that her own heart was a receptacle where all the elements of a hell, — envy, jealousy, lawless passion, hate and malice — run riot, nor that the ungovernable passion she had fostered for him half a dozen years back, had flamed up fiercer than ever, since meeting him in America, and she united to one she had grown to detest, as I doubt not you have, my reader.

One evening, there were a number of friends, Helen, Arthur, Edith and some few others in Mr. Vernon's drawing-room. Mrs. Evelyn had not yet appeared, when the Boyeds entered. As usual, Mrs. Boyed was exquisitely habited, and over all a gossamer woollen thing that draped her with an artistic grace, marvelously becoming. She did not remove it, but after the greetings customary, stood talking with Mr. Vernon, until Mrs. Evelyn came.

"Ah," cried Mrs. Boyed coming towards her, "I want your opinion on a dispute I am having with this obstinate man. Look yonder to that white-faced person, near Mrs. Gleason—Mr. Vernon informs me she is a particular friend of his sister—and tell me if you see a likeness to a gentleman we know?"

Margaret looked as desired. Edith sat with her side face towards them, thrown in full relief, by the crimson curtain, and her own black dress that fell in drapery about her.

"Certainly, though I do not believe I ever thought of it before. Her profile is an exact refined miniature of Mr. Fellows, the minister who has just left our parish."

Mrs. Boyed cannot see the likeness, but I have always remarked it from the first; and just as alike in temperament and character as in features, she might have been a twin-sister, so like another self is she."

"But remember Mr. Vernon, what a rarely talented man he was, fine, brilliant, and energetic; why, he would make one tingle to the finger tips, with the force and aptness of his eloquence, and she"—Mrs. Boyed turned her eyes on the still-faced woman, under discussion, half contemptuously—

"And she," went on Mr. Vernon, taking her words, "is quiet, unobtrusive and but little known. Making allowance for difference of sex, difference of education, and above all, difference of position to which they

have been called, I repeat again, they are twin-souls. You must remember, she is naturally very shrinking and delicate, and was educated in a young ladies school, before girls were expected to know much except superficially, and he, though naturally sensitive as genius ever is, is the most thoroughly cultured man I know, and while the last fifteen years of her life has been spent in the retirement of home, consequently surrounding her with the diffidence arising from such retirement, he as a minister, earnest even to enthusiasm, has been called to fill the foremost places in society, as well as being the most prominent leader in his religious body."

He sought the approval of Mrs. Evelyn, as he concluded, and received it in the expression of her whole grand face. Mrs. Boyed could have struck her, but unconscious Edith got the full force of her venom.

"Well, you may be able to trace a likeness to a more than commonly handsome man, in that washed-out looking person, but surely you cannot find a parallel to his fire and energy, or genius. She seems to me almost idiotic, scarcely ever speaking unless spoken to, and I always wonder what she is good for, when I think of her at all."

A beautiful red grew bright in Mrs. Evelyn's cheeks, and she did not wait for Mr. Vernon to defend his guest.

"Mrs. Riply is not a talker, except with those who

know her best, and they not only love, but honor her as a very superior woman. She is good and faithful, as the whole back record of her life will show, energetic and capable, as through her daily life and its results, it is patent now, and she has more than common gifts, as the world will sometime learn."

"That is true, Mrs. Evelyn, she is by no means common in her intellectual make up, and I have often wished, since I became acquainted with my sister's friend, that Mr. Fellows had known her. I sometimes speculate as to the result of these two coming together, so alike, so rarely endowed. It might have resulted in a very happy union; I think they would have been powerfully attracted to each other. Did you never think of it, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"No," she replied, thoughtfully, "and I am disposed to differ with you now. I am afraid — that should we be suddenly brought face to face with a counterpart of ourselves, in the crude unfinished state we are generally in — I am afraid it would not win our most ardent admiration, or attract us profoundly."

"I am sure you must have less self-love than the most of us, don't you think so, Mr. Vernon?"

Mrs. Boyed was making a strenuous effort to hide the jealous rage that consumed her.

"It appears to me, she forgets self oftener than the most of us," he replied.

"Oh no! not so! I never forget myself!" and there was a slight upward movement of the hand as though warding off something that hurt. The steely eyes marked the spasm of pain, as did also those other pitying ones. It passed with a breath's delay, and she continued: "I think we should feel the most intense discontent with ourselves were we obliged to contemplate our unfinished state always, but God allows us frequent glimpses of ourselves as he sees us, as he intended us to be, and as we shall become, thanks to him, glimpses of our divine perfected selves. As the sculptor sees clearly the perfected image in all its exquisite finish and repose, though only the unshapely block is before his physical eye."

"I agree with our lovely metaphysician, that in many cases, and where we least look for it, the moral deformity is so fearful, so unsightly, that it is no wonder we shrink appalled, and yet they walk among us openly, brazenly, defying the purer humanity to bring them to justice."

Mrs. Boyed held herself with a powerful curb, as she uttered those words, her voice soft, her expression unconscious as an angel's might have been, who commiserated a lost world. Only a gleam shot like an electric spark into Mrs. Evelyn's eyes, and understood by her alone, revealed her malice.

"What weighty matters are you discussing, good people?" said Helen, joining the trio.

"A matter that has exhausted me to follow, so serious has it become, and now if Mr. Boyed has tired of contemplating the fine arts, I think I will go."

Mr. Boyed had been standing beside a parian statuette, though it is safe to say he had not looked at it since taking his place there; on the contrary, he had scarcely removed his eyes from one at least of the speakers, though he had taken no part in the discussion.

"I am quite at your service madame, even the most perfect piece of art grows stale with too long contemplating."

It certainly was not all art that flamed her cheeks so deeply, but to Percy's courteous regret at her brief stay, she replied, still with the complete self-control I have tried to show you,—

"Thanks, but I have another call to make, and I want you all to come early to-morrow evening, and help me in the all-important question of this Church Fair, we are agitating."



CHAPTER XX.

CHARITY.

"O Lord and Master, not ours the guilt,
We build but as our fathers built;
Behold thine images, how they stand,
Sovereign and sole through all the land.

Then Christ sought out an artizan,
A low-browed, stunted, haggard man,
And a motherless girl, whose fingers thin
Pushed from her faintly want and sin.
These he set in the midst of them,
And as they drew back their garment hem,
For fear of defilement, 'Lo, here,' said he,
'The images ye have made of me!'" — LOWELL,



THE people who were to meet at Mrs. Boyed's superb mansion the following evening, were the Committee, elected by the Parish, to arrange the business for a Fair. Mrs. Gleason did not feel any particular interest in being present, for long before this, she had declined to take any active part in such matters. Still, from a friendly feeling towards Mrs. Boyed, she concluded to go, so went around early for Margaret, leaving Mr. Gleason to drop in later. She found that lady in her pretty home dress of white, practising with Ethel, a new song.

"Are n't you going with me, to Mrs. Boyed's this evening?"

"I thought I would not go, unless you wished it very much. Ethel needs me more than those fine people, don't you, dear?" The girl bent and kissed her friend's upturned face for reply, and Helen thought what a pretty picture the two made, the one sitting, the other standing, and Willie leaning across his mother's lap.

"O, yes, I want you to go if I do, and though I do not care about the business of the meeting, because I shall not take any part in it, yet I wish it to go on, and I know my presence will encourage those who do enjoy the getting up of such entertainments, which are very pleasant in a way, and serve a good purpose."

"I noticed the fact long ago, that you avoided taking any active part in the church affairs, pray tell me the reason? it cannot be from indolence, for you are always at work."

"I do not object to telling you my reasons, dear. First, I do not hold to the way church affairs are conducted, but I will name only one thing. You know our church is very large, and very superb, and our pastor is paid a salary in keeping with his state; this is all very right, because the parish is wealthy, and should be allowed to worship God in velvet and rosewood, if they choose, I am sure I like it," and Helen's sunny face rippled with a smile, "but there are also, in this parish, a great many families, who are staunch

believers in our beautiful faith, the faith that assures us of the final white sinlessness of all souls, and these families are bright, enterprising, and belong to the American middle class, and you know they always tend upward. They are not only willing but glad to have their children under the influence of the church and Sunday School, and would be glad to attend themselves, yet the rent of pews in the city churches are so high, that these people find it generally impossible to spare the hundred dollars and upward, that is necessary for a church-going privilege, not counting the extra amount required to dress according to the standard of the times, unless they would be pointed at as an oddity. Well, they say all this extra expense is for the sake of attending a church where they are not counted as anybody, and can have no voice in any of its arrangement; where their children can take no part in the entertainments, though they may be as bright, and gifted as the brightest. I do not wonder they grow indifferent to church influences, and at last let their children have too much liberty on this recurring day of idleness, until from street playing and mixing with a lower grade, they get to riding Sundays, and going on excursions, where all sorts of human beings congregate, and then it is but a step to spending the evening in saloons which are always open. Let me tell you, dear, many a drunkard of to-day could

date his first glass of wine to the unoccupied Sunday evenings of long ago, and many a promising girl has been lost to a useful life, whose first love of show and dainties dated from Sunday pleasuring, and Sunday evenings in a refreshment saloon."

"But how remedy these things? Women belonging to this class, are very resentful, if a suggestion be made that they dress too expensively for their income, and if people will attend grand churches, they must pay for the privilege; I see no other way than separating the classes, let the rich have their stained-glass grandeur, and build cheaper places for the poor."

"No, I do not believe in separating the rich and poor, and I do believe in building grand churches, if men want to pay for them. But I think they should be owned and supported by the parish, and the seats made free to whoever will occupy them. The children should be selected solely for their aptitude and ability, when children's entertainments are the question, and the matter of dress would very soon right itself, if the wealthy would consent to dress plainly and inexpensively in the house of worship, keeping their elegant clothing to wear on those occasions where the poorer do not wish or expect to join, nor feel any heart-burning at the deprivation. Don't you see how soon a woman who is able to have but two complete suits in a year — with some little fixings to make out the inter-

mediate seasons — would feel ashamed to be elaborately and showily dressed in all weathers, when her wealthy neighbor sits near in a suit costing half the price of her own, and plainly made at that. It is true, the wives of artisans and mechanics are apt to resent any interference with their personal adornment — and I should not presume to meddle in that way — but they are mostly sensible, as well as imitative, and would gladly follow a more economical as well as a more becoming and convenient fashion, if adopted by the wealthy when they meet on common ground, as the house of God, or fairs, or concerts, or lectures and such places where the poorer should be allowed as well as the rich; and they would, too, were it not for the miserable bug-bear of dress.” Margaret listened with sympathetic interest.

“ You are right, dear Helen, as you always are, and how plain you make the remedy, if people would only see it as you do. Why don’t you advocate this mode of dressing, why not make your ideas known? they are so reasonable as well as simple, many would adopt them, if led by you. Your influence is so great, that I am certain of your being able to carry any measure you advance. The great trouble with many dress reformers is, they are too terribly radical all at once; they go at the masses with a hammer-like force, and insist upon their ideas being received all in a minute;

or they bring forward some ugly costume, and say 'this is the thing for you to wear, if you want health or sense.' Well, no woman likes to be called a fool because she does not adopt a particular kind of dress, especially if the dress will not only *not* add to her good looks, but will detract from what she has."

"That is very true ; as long as a woman is a real woman, she will try to make herself look pretty, and why should n't she ? and as a general thing the reforms in dress are, as you say, so radical and ugly, that only two kinds of women can wear them. The very pretty who look charming in anything, and those who do not look well in anything. I do use my influence wherever I can to urge these quiet reforms, but you can understand how my money would often have weight, where I or my methods would not be heeded. I do not want my voice to influence because it is my voice, but because it is able to convince. The church question I leave to my husband, only as he may be biased by my opinion ; and the dress question I practise what I believe to be the duty of every rich woman — and the effect on many who attend our church and gatherings, is marked with the best results. They find themselves quite able to dress themselves and children as well as I and my children dress, and many of them with whom I am on friendly terms, come to me for patterns and suggestions about buying, which I am

only too happy to give; and since I cannot have free churches yet, I pay the pew rent for several families, who receive the money every quarter, but never dream whence it comes."

"How much good you do in the world, you wonderful little woman, do you know it?" the tears stood bright in Mrs. Evelyn's eyes, but they did not fall.

"I hope I do, I mean to," replied Helen, simply; "but after all, I am afraid it is not much to my credit, for I enjoy all that I do with intense enjoyment; and I am afraid I am even selfish in some things."

"You, selfish, Aunt Helen, impossible!" Ethel, who had been listening, her sweet girl's face glowing with interest, now answered.

"Let me explain the motives that often influence me, then you can judge. You know the father of Mr. Gleason was a printer, who, though always industrious and commendable in his life, was never yet able to rise above his daily expenses of bringing up and educating his large family. They, however, nobly repaid him for all his care; they every one occupy places of trust. Arthur is the youngest, and was kept to school only until he was sixteen, then, as he inclined to mercantile pursuits, he entered a store and worked his way up, but unlike most young men, he did not give up his studies when he left school, so that when we were married, he was as well schooled, and better than many

who go through college. This being my own experience, and I have found it so blessed, I should not be apt to object, if my girls follow my example, and select a husband among the workers. I certainly should not interpose any objection, were there no inequality but that of money. Such a possibility being warranted, I want to see youths have all the advantages that it is in my power to help them to; for who can tell which of them may sometime become my son-in-law." In this light manner, Helen put off a subject that she had very deeply at heart, and spent a great deal of time and money to advance, that was, the best training, mental and moral, for young people.

"Now I must really run in to Mrs. Boyed's for a little while; come dear, go with me."

"Well, if you think you must go," and Mrs. Evelyn rose and rung for her wrappings. She did not wish to seem to shun Mrs. Boyed, yet she felt that for some reason the woman hated her, and she wished to withdraw from her society as much as possible without seeming to do so.

Some half dozen ladies were present when our friends arrived, and as usual, they were received with marked pleasure. Mrs. Evelyn was quite generally liked, because without by any means being an imitator, she followed the drift of accepted opinion, or if she differed from them, she elaborated her own ideas,

within her own brain, nor intruded them upon others. She was no leader in fashionable fun, follies, amusements, or whatever name you choose to give the social evolutions of the day, but she was a pleasant promoter of them all, consequently a desirable acquaintance to have. The same in a different degree might be said of Mrs. Gleason. She was very generally beloved, though her very radical ideas — never pushed into the faces of others to be sure — but steadily and determinedly carried out by herself on all occasions, often troubling and perplexing her associates. Troubling them, because she acted independently, and from her own point of view, whether in accordance with the accepted view or not. Perplexing them because she did not explain her reasons, or as I said before, push her peculiar ideas, but just did this or that, to suit herself; parried all remonstrances with sunny nonsense, when she knew her truly large and beneficent efforts could not be comprehended, now and then stinging good-naturedly with a bit of fine satire, some folly or some sham, but nobody, however dissatisfied, was disposed to turn coldly from a rich woman like Mrs. Gleason, even could they have given her peculiarities a harsher name; consequently the friends were the center of a group as soon as they entered.

“O, Mrs. Gleason,” cried Mrs. Churchill, clasping her hand, “I am so glad you have come; we have

concluded to get up a series of Tableaux, and we want your Alice and Maud, because they are so fair, one for a Water-Nymph, and the other as a Fairy." "Yes," chimed in another lady, "and you can afford to dress them so beautifully." "You will let us have them, won't you?" urged the first speaker, interpreting aright, the shade on the bright face.

"No. My girls are not adapted to anything of the kind. Maud is very bashful, and would be as apt to put her hands up to her face as any way, in the midst of the picture, and Alice took part in our last Fair, so you must permit me to decline your offer to put them forward. There is Thersa Moulton and Julia Ward, two remarkably bright, handsome children, of the same complexion as mine, and I would suggest they be offered the part." The ladies looked dissatisfied.

"But think, dear Mrs. Gleason, it will cost a large amount to get up a dress suitable for Undine, and beside, Josie Earl is to appear as the Knight, and he was urgent that Alice should be his Undine, and I do not like to displease him." Mrs. Gleason was very glad to have this opportunity to learn a trait in the lad's disposition, but of course she did not say so, she only replied, —

"I am quite decided not to let my girls appear, for the reasons I have advanced. But I am desirous to have the children I have named, take a part. I think

a great deal of them both, and Thersa looks enough like my Alice to be her sister."

"But they are very poor people," remonstrated another lady, "and the dress will be quite expensive."

"They certainly are not rich people, but I think they will be able to get up the dress as I understand it ought to be. If you choose to put the name down for the part, I will see Mrs. Moulton—she is a dear friend of mine, and I will also attend to little Julie, and relieve you of all care of those two."

There was evident dissatisfaction, but after some debate, the names were put down for the parts. Mrs. Gleason was chatting with another lady, when the decision was handed her, just as Mrs. Boyed came with her petition.

"Thank you, Mrs. Churchill. Now, Mrs. Boyed, I am so pleased with the good nature of these ladies, that I am tempted to say yes, to whatever you ask."

"Do! that's a darling," and the lady playfully put the paper behind her.

"No, I think I dare n't; you might request me to make a speech, a lecture on some popular Rights, if you wanted to punish me very greatly, so I will learn your wishes, before subscribing to them."

"It is nothing so bad as that, it is only to make yourself beautiful for the benefit of your friends," and she presented the paper, "You must persuade Mrs.

Evelyn to put her name down, I have exhausted my eloquence, and cannot move her, and I have quite set my heart on having her at one of the tables." Mrs. Boyed did not explain her fiendish purpose in urging the beautiful Margaret to take a prominent place in the Fair, but she had one, as we shall learn by and by.

"What a fearful escape I have had!" cried Helen, laughing, "I found the labors so consuming at our last fair, that I am quite determined not to be caught again."

"O, don't say that, or we shall not be able to persuade Mrs. Evelyn," and Mrs. Boyed was quite in earnest.

But Helen shook her head. "I cannot, I have already more work laid out for next October, than I can attend to properly, I am afraid; you must really do without any active help from me."

"Well, perhaps you will suggest some one, for I must have two more, and I can think of no one, if you and Mrs. Evelyn disappoint me."

Helen did wish to suggest some one, but would not without an invitation, now she was very glad to say,—

"I wish you would give the table to my friend, Mrs. Riply; if you do, it will please me greatly."

"If Mrs. Riply will accept, I will allow myself to be persuaded," said Mrs. Evelyn, rightly interpreting Helen's urgent glance to herself.

Mrs. Boyed was vexed, but there was no help for it, and after all, she had no reasonable dislike to Edith, only she could not impress her, and it always vexed her pride to find people of this kind. She had a something in her make-up, that had she been one of our modern spiritual shams, I should have called professional pride; she counted on bending all wills to her own, and had not the philosophy to accept a defeat, as such always must more or less. Had this insignificant woman, with her pale face and averted eyes, taken to her kindly, the lady would have been lavish in her patronage; but you see Edith — with her proud blood from many generations back, of superior men and women — striving with poverty and calumny, was not a very tractable thing to patronise, so Lady Boyed found it, and her complacent friendliness took a miff, and adopted the other line. However, Mrs. Evelyn must be secured at any cost, so the names were written.

The business was quite satisfactorily completed when the gentlemen began to drop in, by one and two's, and the rooms assumed an appearance of a pleasant evening party; but very greatly to the satisfaction of the hostess, Helen and Margaret took their leave before the arrival of Arthur and Percy. After going around to Edith's room to coax her into the Fair arrangement, which, with some difficulty they were

able to do, they went home to Mrs. Gleason's, this being nearest, to wait for the gentlemen, who, Helen said, would soon be home. She was not wrong, though it required the fiercest self-control to enable Mrs. Boyed to hide her disappointment at the short delay they made, and there was something in the steely clasp of her small, perfect fingers, as she gave Mr. Vernon her hand at parting, that startled him, a possible recurrence of the old annoyance in Paris, seemed anything but desirable. Mrs. Gleason had barely removed her wraps when her husband entered, accompanied by her brother.

"I thought we should find you here," Arthur said, "what made you run away so early?"

"We had another call to make, but we did not expect you quite so soon."

"O, I could not keep your brother, he is altogether skeptical in regard to the religious societies of the days we live in. He insists that churches are not what they were ages ago, even fifty years ago, and that religion is dying out. Can't you convince him that religion still exists as grandly real as ever, only we regard it differently. Don't you think so, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Yes, I think we have as much real religion as ever, but we no longer look upon it as a strange unknown something, awesome and unlovely, to which we must bow with fear and trembling, and speak of with

changed tones, as though it was a fearful good which we must accept, or receive the penalty — instead of a bright, beneficent good that being within us, and a part of our daily lives, lifts us up to its divine source until it seems our natural state, instead of merely subscribing to a doctrine, or submitting to a polity.”

“Still, dear Margaret, you must feel with me that the church is very different from what it was. Instead of being a body of people who banded together because they were drawn together by some deep and fervent conviction of faith, that reached far upward to the throne of God, before which they knelt with such reverence, fervor, and trust, that fire nor flood, torture nor death, could loose their hold; it is now to a large degree, a merely social institution, and men and women go to that church, as a general thing, that will give them the prestige of the best society — so called — suppose they have the wealth or pretence to support it. But tell me, brother, what those slow-moving, dreamy eyes of yours, see in the present of our church.”

“I look upon the church much as you do, as a mere social institution, where pretence and money will push themselves forward, yet, as the savor of past Godliness, and much of the Godliness that is still left in the world is found within its walls; it is good to go there, at least send our children there, since we know of nothing better; but as for religion, I feel as I said to Arthur,

that religion, instead of the perennial source of joy and strength, has given place to a crooning old scold, that when she can't scare or coax, will move one to give her by consideration of her doles or even of her weakness."

"There is much to convince in what you say," replied Arthur, "but though I admit there is less of the solemn austerity, less of the martyr spirit that would go to the stake without flinching, yet, I think it is because we know more of the wonders that surround us, than the ages gone, more of the nature of religion, and its application to our daily life, and I believe with Mrs. Evelyn, that we do not have less religion, but a brighter, and more cheerful, more of a living, everyday sort."

"There are impulses, inspirations, thoughts, that hang about the border-land of poetry, yet these are not poetry. They help to make the poet, strengthen and invigorate him to do his work; yet these things are not what constitutes the poet nor the poetry; a man may have them all, yet is not a poet, nor could write a line of poetry, for his life. The true essence is something deeper, higher, something that can find its home only in the nature prepared for it, and this preparation is a gift at birth, received from the fount of God. So with the other. There are many noble attributes that hang about the border-land of religion; morality, that is

obedience to the moral law according to right or wrong ; that is all very well, though as it is something that can be acquired, and put on like an approved and becoming garment, I hold as higher attributes the innate love of truth, chastity, and humanity, these attributes and all the minor ones that spring from them, go to make a man perfect, as a character, but it does not make him religious. The man is capable of all these grand things that make him a character worthy of his image ; but Wesley says, man is capable of God ! This being so, when the soul of man can reach up to the divine source and grasp the Infinite, and receive from it his daily assurance of grace, he alone knows the meaning of religion, or feels it deeply. But in these hurrying, jostling, sneering, skeptical days, who can find time for such religion, or will accept the conditions to make such a religion possible ? ”

“ I think you are right, Percy. I have long felt this lack of genuineness you express, but I did not know what to call it. I think, Margie, you will be obliged to yield to his idea of the true religion dying out, or I should say, burning out, like the stars, perhaps, to give place to a more useful, intelligent kind, as the far away burning, revolving balls of fire die out and cool, and finally become a world for a race of beings, perhaps, like ourselves. You still look unconvinced, dear.”

“ Perhaps not unconvinced, but one dreads to feel

that all the old religion of the past is drifting far down the ages, and only the solemn music that has breathed through its mighty spirit reaches us in faint, low sounds, and at intervals. Take from the struggling worker the comfort of religion, with nothing to answer in the place of it, unclasp his hand from this most reliable stronghold, and he drifts aimlessly, and hopelessly, since you take from him his belief in the beyond, some good for him he cannot find here."

Margaret arose and drew her shawl around her. She had spoken with much feeling, for she knew whereof she spoke, and the others respected her feelings, nor answered in words, but Helen's good-night kiss was warmer, and Arthur's hand-clasp held her's a trifle closer, when he bid her good-night.

"O, I had nearly forgotten," and Mr. Vernon turned back — "about Ethel's letter that came after you went away this evening. The Atkins' are making the most elaborate preparations to receive us all, next week, and Ethel is delighted with the idea of playing hostess. We have arrived at the conclusion, that travelling with our own horses will be the thing to do, it is so difficult to procure desirable teams in Lincoln, but further details we left until we all meet together to-morrow at tea at my house, if you are agreeable? Will you be there? children, also."

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, good-night."

"Good-night."

It was quite late, and the distance was not far, but Percy would not have given the few brief minutes consumed for a cycle of hours otherwise employed. It was the first time he had ever been absolutely alone with Mrs. Evelyn, and he wondered—as he marked the perfect unconsciousness of her mein—how she could fail to feel the great and protective tenderness that overshadowed her. Perhaps she did feel it, and this might have been the very reason of her trustful peace, but whatever she might have felt, she certainly had never dreamed of the great, true love that was waiting her acceptance.

They found a telegram from Mrs. Casā, to the effect that she should be in town on the arrival of the night train.

"We shall have her at breakfast," said Mr. Vernon, "that will be pleasant. Perhaps she will conclude, at this late hour, to join us in our farm experience."

When Mrs. Evelyn entered the breakfast-room, the next morning, she found Mrs. Casā already there. She had not waited for her brother's carriage, but had taken a hack, and came with her maid and baggage at an early hour; but her room was always ready for her, so taking a cup of coffee, she bathed and dressed, then descended to the sunny breakfast-room before the last

bell had rung. Here Mr. Vernon was waiting to welcome her. Her first words after their warm greeting, was a compliment.

"How can you refuse to go with me, Percy? when I have quite set my heart upon it. You spent the most of the summer in Lincoln last year, why not go with me this summer?"

"Why won't you go with us, sister? we shall be very glad to have you. You have made no particular arrangements, while it would disappoint a dozen people, and disarrange a settled plan, should I go in a different direction?"

"O, yes, I have promised Mrs. Boyed I would go in company with her, and she and her husband are as earnest as I am to have you with them. Come, that is a dear. Let Helen take charge of Ethel, though as for that matter, I suppose her governess will attend to her; and you join the Boyed party with me. They are such delightful people." It was something more than mere denial that Alice read in her brother's grave face, but she was too superficial herself to look deeper than the surface. "Ah, I see, you are determined not to be persuaded."

"I cannot leave my daughter, Alice; she is too precious, and too lately recovered, to leave her even for a month, voluntarily."

Mrs. Casā felt like saying an unpleasant thing just

then, but policy, if not good breeding restrained her, and a moment later, when Ethel came in wearing her sixteen years like a princess, she put out her hand with real pride and pleasure, and even kissed her with some warmth. It was the involuntary homage of a world worshipper, to one of nature's most perfect creatures. After welcoming her Aunt Alice, she went and nestled by her father's side, her invariable custom when they met in the morning. I should like to have those tearing reformers — who would turn nature upside down, and put children to herd together like so many sheep, only away from parents, which even sheep won't consent to unless compelled — look upon the picture I so well remember — for it is no ideal picture — and then tell me if nature don't believe in the sacred privacy of homes and families, and the more or less exclusive selfishness of human love. Universal love is very well, very grand, a fine thing to talk about, musical words to utter, and gives you an idea of a large soul, capable of great work ; but in the varied experience of my restless life, I have never known a truly great-hearted man or woman who were always equal to a deed of mercy, or ready to do any work in their power for the sake of the general good, who did not have some one or more whom they loved with fervor, and who lived in their heart's holy of holies. On the other hand, I have never known a universal lover who berated you

for loving your child, your parent, or your other dear ones who belonged to you by blood or affinity, who was capable of a hearty, unselfish deed, one who would put himself to a strait, or much inconvenience unless it would administer in some way to his pride, self-love or gratification. But there! it always put me out of patience when I think of them, so let us go back to breakfast, for the bell has rung, Mrs. Emery is behind the coffee-urn, and the rest have got through with the morning greeting and taken their places at the table, and since they have all unconsciously left us—you and I, reader—without an invitation to join them, we will look on, and about us.

“I do not know as I have your sympathy, but one of my weaknesses about home and house-keeping is my eating-room, and since Mr. Vernon’s is my complete ideal, I want you to wait here a moment and see it in detail. Since we are only spirits, we cannot accept of the faintly odored, delicious coffee, in the large, white cups of plain china, nor a slice of the sumptuous home-made bread, lying in loaf on the carved bread-board, with the thin, sharp knife ready when the bread is wanted, nor the hot Graham rolls, that so few know how to have well made, on the table. The butter, sugar, cream, and all the delectables, are in dishes of sparkling cut-glass, while the flash of silver, rival their brightness. Meats, temptingly sliced and bordered by green rel-

ishes, are covered with silver-wire screens, while eggs, and nicely prepared potatoes, complete a simple, yet delicious repast, for a person an hour or so out of bed. The ugly colored napery with which some house-keepers like to disfigure their tables, never finds its way to the Vernon dining-room, but snowy white, fine and plain, assures you of a home-board, and not a restaurant. The dining-room you see, is a long room, built out from the main building, with a jutting window, filling up the end looking to the east, for you see my friends love the morning sunlight as well as I do. Two more long windows looking southward, with a superb sideboard between them, fills up that side of the room; while the north side is filled with a chimney; a grate with all its polished belongings, and on either side of it fine pictures — appropriate to the use of the room — are hung.

An Aquarium from which a tiny stream breaks sparkling, is alive with gold and silver fishes, and glass cases of ferns and various pots of trailing plants make a garden of the east window. It is summer, you know, therefore the heavy warm curtains are removed, and voluminous curtains of snowy lace drape the windows, also, the carpet, the warm, dark carpet that gives such a sense of comfort in winter, is replaced with white, thick matting. Altogether, it is a rare, cool, delightful place, and you feel the moment you enter, that genu-

ine folk live there, nothing false or artificial. There, how do you like the picture?

Alice did not renew her entreaties for her brother's company, though she did not quite give him up. She wanted to be with him, yet she could not decide on giving up the busy, brilliant days and nights of the great world's resorts, and lose the possible conquests that might still be hers, or the triumphs her beauty, wealth, and position could still command, for the rational, quiet, and homely rest of a farm life among the mountains.

But at tea, when they were all assembled, she once more assayed to carry her point. Percy, without immediately replying, glanced at Ethel, but her look of dismay pained him, and he would not allow it for an instant.

"No, Alice, it cannot be. Our arrangements are all made for the summer; we shall be glad of your company, but the few weeks we intend to be absent from home, we shall spend together in New Hampshire. Can't you persuade your Aunt Alice to go with us, Pet?" he said, touching ever so lightly Ethel's bright cheek.

"I really wish you would go, Aunt Alice, I am sure we shall all be happy to have you."

And here a chorus of voices tried to induce the lady to decide in favor of country simplicity, by all the

various arrangements each anticipated. She had a promise of rides pony-back, by Miss Maud, and all the new milk she could drink by another tiny girl, while her namesake told her confidentially, that it was Ethel's farm to which they were going, and promised to show her the nicest early apples, and choice cherries that grew in abundance all about the place, and the eloquence of old and young was so effective that Mrs. Casā had quite made up her mind to go with them; when, in the course of the evening, Mrs. Boyed came in to welcome her, and learn if her secret wish was likely to be fruitious. She had set her lawless heart on having Mr. Vernon in her train this summer. She flattered herself that could this come about she could surround him with a control of power which she believed in, and it *had* proved a power for much evil in her hands. It seemed to her if she could be alone with him but a few moments even, she could make an impression that would lead him to be less invulnerable to her determined will.

She had daringly come to the house alone, well knowing Mr. Vernon would not allow her to return alone, and it late. She had tried to bring about some such conjuncture ever since the party on the cliff, but in every case she had been foiled. Now it seemed she was about to be cheated out of her most passionate desire, that of having him in her party, by the vacillat-

ing of Mrs. Casā. She could have shaken her. Under her emotions of disappointment her siren voice grew husky, and to her vexation it was noticed, and in spite of herself she met the dark, slow eyes of Mr. Vernon, and read there his understanding of the cause ; she knew he remembered another occasion when she could only speak in a whisper. How she hated herself for showing her weakness like a puling girl, when she needed all her strength. Heavens ! was there nothing to be done ? her brain throbbed and burned in its effort to recover lost ground. It was so humiliating, she bitterly thought, that the very depth and force of her passion should be the means in a degree, of rendering her powerless.

When Mrs. Casā found how disappointed the lady was, her resolution veered again, and she declared she would abide by her first plan — and though her *dear* friend wanted to tell her fiercely, that her presence was not desired since she could not draw the brother along — she replied, sweetly, —

“ O, you must not let my desires have weight against the wishes of your friends.”

“ Let me suggest a way,” cried Helen, “ Alice can go to Long Branch with Mrs. Boyed, and stay until they both get tired of it, then come up and spend the remainder of the season with us.”

They all looked towards Percy, and he instantly came to his sister's help.

"I think that will be a pleasant arrangement for us, if the ladies find it agreeable. Will you accept it, Mrs. Boyed?"

"I shall be delighted," she replied, and so she was, and inwardly determined to make the stay at Long Branch, short indeed.

Everything being adjusted to the satisfaction of those concerned, Mrs. Boyed arose to say good-night, but to her annoyance, Mrs. Gleason protested,—

"Wait a few moments, and go with us, we are going home directly."

"But it will be out of your way."

"None to speak of," replied Mr. Gleason, while Helen put on her shawl and hat—the children had been sent home earlier in the evening—Mrs. Boyed tried to comfort herself with thinking what she would do, by and by. So under various moods the good-nights were spoken, and the callers went away, and Percy and the two ladies were left alone.

"What new society was Mrs. Boyed talking about, Alice? Did n't I hear her asking you to help her organize something of that kind?"

"No, not to help her. You know there is a Club of Transcendental Literati in your city, who meet once a month at Mrs. Sinclair's to talk polished infidelity, and the like. Well, the Historian of the Club—I do not remember her name—Helen knows her very well. Don't you know who I mean, Mrs. Evelyn?"

efit women and girls. Though the majority are women of superior culture, yet I suppose they cannot properly be termed literary; they do not aspire to that distinction; yet one cannot spend an evening in their reunions without going away richer, without the mind receiving a germ as well as the heart, that will spring and bear fruit, so the tillage be the right kind."

"Yes," said Percy, "it is an organization worthy the grand women who conceived it. They deal in the practical rather than the theoretical, yet strive to brighten every hard, homely fact with a sympathizing human interest. They have money, but instead of subscribing to this, that, and the other thing, and so help build up those amazing institutions for poor children in which our city abounds, and feel that they have done all their duty — they have each from one to two or more pensioners according to their means. Some have one or two or more bright girls going through the higher schools, others have children, orphans, and are boarding them in good families, where they can have good home training, and will see that they are established for life, or as well established as mortals can foreknow. Others assist, wherever they find them, that class of women who, having been brought up without knowing anything in particular become poor, and are consequently the saddest objects for charity."

"Well, I have no doubt they do a great amount of good; but I think with Mrs. Boyed, that the organ-

ization is too democratic. It admits every person who applies, whether they be rich or poor, and they must agree to do, or see to doing a certain amount of work. For instance: Instead of paying a certain amount of money, each lady must take the responsibility of educating one or more children, taking all the care just the same as though they were her own. Afterwards have them trained to some business, or trade, or profession. The idea would not be so bad, if you could take the child or children you select away from their families; as it is, their low relations will always hang about them, and be a hindrance to their getting on."

"On the contrary, sister, the cultured one will lift the others up to itself, if that one be of the right metal, and rightly trained. This is one of the principal objects, I think; to have a child selected among the enterprising poor, and not take it from its relations, if it has any, but as it grows out of its low estate, and receives the stimulus of a higher mental and moral training, the power of its influence will be such that all akin to it will grow ambitious to emulate the favored one. Thus you see the cultivating of some individual minds, among a crowd of dullards, will have the effect of leaven in a measure of meal. Sooner or later the whole mass will stir with a new power. Is not this the outline of your idea, Mrs. Evelyn?"

"Yes, but Mrs. Casā should attend some of the meetings, if she would fully understand the glorious

motives that actuate the members, and the extent of the good they do. I will tell you why each one is required to take the responsibility of attending the work in person. We know the human sympathies enlarge by use, therefore, they consider the exercise of these faculties as beneficial to the giver as to the receiver. The law of sympathy is wide as the poles, and has more to do in the happiness and elevation of the world than almost any other attribute of the soul. The law of sympathy increases the vital forces, and will impart to the sad, the sick, the over-worked, and care-burdened a vital force without diminishing itself. When we can understand this law perfectly, we can understand how a band of noble women in perfect sympathy with God and angels, can do such a wonderful amount of good among the less fortunate, and less gifted, when they will give themselves to the work."

"Well, for myself, I have no taste for missionary labors; there are those who have, and to those I leave it, believing that I shall do all that is required of me, if I pay a share of what I have, to support them."

"You are perfectly right, my sister, everything on earth has its uses, even the canary bird, and the butterfly, and if your use is to look beautiful and be loved, who shall fault you?" and Percy kissed her tenderly, they parted for the night, quite satisfied to have her just as she was.

CHAPTER XXI.

NATURAL TENDENCIES.

"With live woman and men to be found in the world —
(Live with sorrow and sin — live with pain and passion,)
Who could live with a doll, tho' its locks should be curl'd,
And its petticoats trimm'd in the fashion?"

— OWEN MEREDITH.



AFTER the ladies had retired, Mr. Vernon closed the drawing-room door, and approaching the light, unfolded a bit of paper, which he drew from his vest pocket. He did not read it immediately. He was leaning by the mantle, the hand holding the paper dropped by his side, and his eyes resting on the rug at his feet.

"I wonder what purpose this strange creature has in view," he mused. "I trust I am not conceited, yet her tones, the wicked attractiveness of her magnetic eyes, and the unmistakable touch of her beautiful fingers, warn me to remember her undesirable partiality in Paris. Is it possible that daring and unscrupulous as she is, she would make advances to me, and she a wife? I wish I had refused to take this bit of paper. Pshaw! it may be only a begging letter, to contribute to some of her charitable freaks." He opened it, and read, and read again. It was only a few lines. "I want to talk with you," it said, "where we shall not

be interrupted, upon a matter which concerns your welfare nearly. I cannot rest without making you acquainted with the fearful fraud practiced upon you and your child, as well as your nearest friends. Do not let a prejudice bias you against listening to me, for I am a sufferer in the same cause. Come to my house to-morrow at seven, P. M."

What could it all mean? He remembered she sat by the table writing while Helen was putting on her hat and shawl, and the fact of her coming alone to his house in the evening, might have been to give him the opportunity of returning with her. He decided to go and see what she had to say.

"She means mischief somewhere," he thought, "and is quite capable of planning and executing any amount, and if it is directed towards Mrs. Evelyn, as I am afraid it is, it is better to have open warfare than try to parry her missiles in the dark."

The next evening at the hour named, Mr. Vernon rang the bell at Mrs. Boyed's door, and was conducted by the colored footman, up the broad stairway that led to Mrs. Boyed's own superb apartments; and really, Percy was almost disposed to fancy himself in the interior of some Oriental palace, rather than in an ordinary dwelling of this practical century; so wide and lofty the room; and so gorgeous the adornment, fit retreat for the magnificent woman standing in the centre of the

floor when he entered. The great height and breadth of this room was enhanced by the mirror panelling, and fresco. All the satin drapery of the windows, and coverings of the furniture, as well as the velvet rugs that nearly covered the inlaid floor, were wine-hued, and the light that fell from a chandelier hung high from the dome-like centre of the ceiling was tempered by shades the palest tint of the same color. The frames of the low, sumptuous couches, ottomans and rockers were of white enamel, and on several gilt tripods standing around, were gilded vases, from which were growing the silvery white lily of the Nile, whose fragrance burdened the air with sweetness. From the ceiling hung baskets of gilt wire, and in these the various greens from the fern family, mingled with different kinds of snow-white blossoms, and from an unseen source, a low harmony beat the air. Every sense was taken by storm, for not the least bewildering was the queen of this magnificence. A silken tissue of glittering white fell about her and trailed upon the wine-hued rug. Her belt was a golden band fastened by a single large ruby. Her neck and shoulders and arms, white and perfect as sculptured marble, were bare, only as chains of wine-red rubys rendered them more perilously beautiful. Her own hair, made the most of by the barber's art, lay in rings all over her head, and some longer false curls nipped among the short mass, made a most be-

coming head-dressing, and gave her a far more youthful look than naturally belonged to her. Every thing that nature—made the most of by art—could do to dazzle and bewitch, was done in anticipation of this interview; but her first glance telegraphed back to the sick heart how useless it had all been.

Mr. Vernon stood before her in his courtly gravity, as was his usual bearing, and wholly unmoved by this Mahometan heaven in miniature, opened to his gaze.

“I have come, Mrs. Boyed,” he said withdrawing his hand from her clasp, “to learn the meaning of the obscure hints contained in your note.”

He took a seat opposite her, instead of by her side where she had motioned him. Never before since she was a girl in her early teens, when she first learned her power, and never hesitated to use it to sweep any obstacle from her path, had she been disheartened until this moment; and though she knew it not, this touch of human weakness did more to dispose the gentleman to listen to her, than anything she could have done or said. For while her superb physique made no more impression upon him, than gratifying his sense of the beautiful, his great positiveness rendered him impervious to her subtle magnetism. The bit of real womanliness that showed in her bent head, and tremulous lip, gave her more consideration in his eyes than all the arts of which she was mistress. She was quick to see even this concession, and governed herself accordingly.

"I wish you to believe, Mr. Vernon, that were I not actuated by a warm friendship for you, I should not let my indignation get the better of my judgment—for I am about to do a very thankless task—but should forever hold my peace, nor would the world at large be wiser for the knowledge I have of this matter. Will you believe this?"

"I hope I am inclined to believe the best of every one, madame." How she writhed under his impassable courtesy, but somebody should pay for it!

"Well, Mr. Vernon, knowing how scrupulous you are in your idea of woman, and knowing how dear your beautiful daughter is to you, as well as your sisters, I feel compelled to enlighten you as to the character of the woman you have given a place of honor and trust in your house, and only one other person in the world is aware of this fact but myself."

Percy was not unprepared for something of this kind, yet it hurt, and he would not help her by even a look; he only said:

"Thank you, Mrs. Boyed."

"The person whom you trust with the care of your daughter is a woman of unchaste life, the mother of a child whose father was not her husband, and with whom she lived, until he tired of her, as always happens sooner or later, you know, to those unfortunate creatures. The most reprehensible part of it, her conduct

drove her husband away from home, for he did not want to expose her, and he could not live with her, but his disgrace so wore upon him, that he committed suicide, rather than return. You did not know this?"

"No, this is news to me, except the statement concerning her husband. I happen to be better informed than you seem to be about him. Will you tell me the name of the coward, who after sharing her guilt, left her in the destitute condition my sister found her?"

The base woman cowed under the fire that had leaped into those large eyes, but she was forced to answer, so she endeavored to play out her part as commenced. "You can have some conception of my wretchedness when I tell you it was Mr. Boyed," and the bit of lace was raised to her eyes with a show of grief as unreal as anything else about her.

"Ah! and you became that villian's wife, knowing him to be a libertine, a liar, a tattler, and a cowardly miser, to leave a delicate woman and his own child on the verge of starvation in mid-winter!"

"You are severe, Mr. Vernon. I did not know the circumstances, until my associating with Mrs. Evelyn drew the fact of her impurity from him to induce me to shun her," — the gentleman could not restrain an impatient "pshaw!" — "and I did not rest after my suspicions were aroused until I had learned the entire truth, and I will not rest after this, until I am as free from him as the law can free me."

Mr. Vernon was looking at her, indeed he had not removed his eyes from her face, since she had commenced her tissue of truth and falsehood. She could not meet his contemptuous glance, but she felt it, and it aroused a feeling of desperation, as she saw she was losing ground.

"Do you know that if you apply for a divorce, you will drag this poor woman's name, begrimed, to the eyes of all the world? and according to your own showing, her misfortune is known to none except those most interested?"

"Well, and why not? why should such crimes be hidden? for my own part, I believe in making such criminals stand up and be seen in their true light, nor contaminate the pure by their presence!"

"How would the case be if the names were Miss Selam and Stewart Arnold?"

She recoiled as though stung, but not yet, she would not yet give up.

"Cruel," she murmured, clasping her hands in her lap, and partly turning her head away, "cruel, cruel to remember to my prejudice, those things which transpired in Paris, when, if you would but believe the truth, you would see I was not to blame."

"Not to blame! O woman! not to blame? for luring on by your cursed arts, a man ten years younger than yourself, until he had spent upon you his entire

fortune, driven his young wife to suicide, and then, when you would leave him to play your devilish wiles on another one with more gold than brains, he, mad with jealousy, became a murderer, under the barbarous sanction of duelling, and then went mad, indeed you, better than any other, know where he is ; while the tender-souled forgiving wife of your last victim, lives in mournful retirement with her young children on the remnant of her husband's once handsome property. And you, who had so managed as to keep your garments free from a suspicious stain even, except by the few who knew the truth, came to America to luxuriate in your ill-gotten gains. After all this, you, *you* presume to threaten with exposure a woman whose only crime was trusting a villian, who only found his mate when he met you ! ”

Percy's noble face was luminous with his feelings of just scorn, but his words had a different effect from what he had expected upon the cowering woman near him. She had not moved from her position, only her head drooped lower, and now he rose up, saying perhaps a little more gently, for guilty as he knew her to be, her humiliation was distasteful to him :

“ If this is all you have to say to me, I will go, but beg of you to think, before you drag through the world's condemnation, a woman who has already suffered so much.”

He made a motion to withdraw, but Mrs. Boyed who had risen when he did, now found her voice, and the words that poured from her lips hurriedly, had no hope for her cause in them, yet anything to detain him.

“Mr. Vernon, hear me! That a foolish boy loved me without encouragement or any recognition of his madness by me, is true; and those who know the circumstances, will clear me from blame in connection with his idiotic wife. As to Traversa, I scarcely knew him, and the quarrel between him and Arnold, did not involve me, as those present at his death-bed will testify. For, O Percy, from the hour I saw you in yonder glittering city, I had never a thought for another. You knew it then, as you know it now; you knew that though I moved in that great world, among the grandest people, and men hung around me as satellites, I never gave them encouragement, I had nothing but the merest commonplaces for them, all that was best, all that was truest in me, I gave to you! and you turned from me then as now. I was restless and unhappy after you left Paris. I could not live there, your beautiful, pitiless face was ever before me, and I persuaded my father to travel with me, and we went everywhere, where people go. When we went back to Paris, I heard you was dead. Then I came to America. This man Boyed, became importunate that I should marry him, and I did. I did not love him, but I think I must

have been possessed by a species of madness then, though I was not utterly wretched, until you again appeared, then my marriage became unbearable. O, man! man, have some pity on me, only try to love me, and I will soon rend this hateful union ——” Mr. Vernon put out his hand.

“Are you mad! Do not degrade yourself to me, Mrs. Boyed, it is useless! worse! I do not love you, I cannot love you, and to prevent all misunderstanding, I must tell you that I was at the death-bed of poor Traversa. Arnold was also there, and by a mutual understanding of your infernal duplicity, they parted forgiven and forgiving. There and then, I learned all there was to learn about you, madame, and though you was too astute to let the world, that credulous world, so wise in what it guesses, and blind as a bat as to what is, put a blot upon your name and fame, yet there are some who know you as you are; and though I have had no desire to call up this shameful thing, or interfere with your course in this city, though I am aware of your pernicious influence, and regret to have my dear ones come within its circle. But now I warn you. If you breathe a word that shall in any way militate against the fair name of Mrs. Evelyn, I will denounce you, and then summon witnesses from over the sea to make good my story.”

The guilty woman recoiled as he waved her back,

but still stood with clasped hands, leaning a little towards him, her eyes unmoved from his face, as he in a low, impressive voice, uttered this threat, then without a word, she fell in a glittering heap upon the floor.

Mr. Vernon did not offer to raise her up; he thought it more than probable that she was playing a part, but if she was not, and was really stricken, it was only the result of some broken law, therefore concluded to let the decree take its course, though, as he mused going towards home, it is difficult to decide where such misconceived creatures do the most harm, in the body or out.

As the door closed on Mr. Vernon, one of the satin curtains was put back, and Mr. Boyed stepped in from the balcony, where he had sat since before Mr. Vernon's entrance, and of course had heard every word uttered, and now as the baffled and enraged woman gathered herself up, she stood face to face with her husband.

"Well, madame." The tones were cold, sneering, diabolical, and the pitiless eyes bleached to the palest blue, glittered wickedly.

"Well sir, why are you here? how dare you enter my private rooms without liberty?"

"By the right of ownership, madame; I had a fancy for knowing what that elaborate toilet meant, therefore took my seat by the window yonder, and upon my word, it was an entertainment of which a husband should be proud."

“Villain!” she hissed, “sneaking villain!”

“Very true, my beauty, but we are well matched, as the Grand Duke said. Why did you not tell him that you learned the secret concerning that most injured woman, by treasuring the words dropped from the lips of your sleeping husband, and then, by cooing, coaxing and threatening, you learned the whole shameful story. Why did you not tell him it was to save yourself from poverty, that you accepted the first man who was idiotic enough to offer you a home that you considered suitable for your magnificence? I may as well tell you now, that I know your intentions towards Mrs. Evelyn, when she stands conspicuous in the Fair this Autumn, as she will stand, the most beautiful woman present, for in spite of her blemished beauty, she is still the fairest as she is the best among women. You are planning to have the story of her humiliating mistake, — without implicating yourself or husband — breathed through the crowd, by a whisper so subtle, none can tell whence it comes or whither it goes. Your manoeuvre of advertising, begging all sorts of people to send letters for the fair, would completely hide the devilish hand that does the work. But now listen to me, as God gives me breath and you dare to use any means whatever to injure Mrs. Evelyn — I know you will not take the course of law mentioned to Mr. Vernon, you care too much for your luxury — but just so sure as you attempt to

work her ill, I will repudiate you, publish my shame, and your wickedness, so beware!"

His wife had regarded him with the glare of a fiend while he was speaking, and now without answering, turned and walked to her bed-chamber, one of this gorgeous suite, and instantly reappearing, she came quite up to Mr. Boyed, and without a word, raised her hand and discharged a pistol, but he, it might be, anticipated something of the kind, for throwing up his hand, he seized her wrist, and while the first ball flew harmlessly into the ceiling, the next crashed with a dull thud in through her scheming brain, and she dropped, this time lifeless, to the floor.

Allen Boyed stood and looked at the inanimate heap just as she fell, the tiny pistol clenched in her stiffening hand, showing plainly it was self-murder. Who was to know that he bent the hand so that the swift missile should enter her temple, or that his own finger pressed hers that held the fatal thing, to do their work. Well, perhaps he did not, no human eye beheld him, so who shall say?

Leaving her, after being sure the fearful deed was well done, he went out the way whence he came in, and going down the wire stairs that led to the garden, he let himself into the street, and showed himself at different places during the remainder of the evening, and when he returned home late, he brought a friend who lived

out of town, and whose family was away. They found the house in terrible confusion, guarded by policemen, and the servants in weeping, whispering groups, shuddering at the fearful thing up stairs.

Mr. Boyed learned that Nannie, Mrs. Boyed's maid, after waiting until very late, went to her mistress' room, and rapped, and not getting an answer after rapping several times, ventured to go in, and found her lying cold, as though she had been dead some time. The footman who had opened the door for Mr. Vernon when he went out early in the evening, noticed nothing in that gentleman's appearance, but he did remember positively of hearing two pistol shots shortly after, as did Nannie, who was talking with him at the time in the hall, but though the shot sounded near, and even startled them so they stopped talking, and listened, still they did not suppose it was in the house, and thought nothing particular about it, until it grew late, and Nannie wondered that her mistress did not dismiss her, and in looking after the cause, found the fearful thing she did.

The dreadful occurrence created a sensation of horror throughout the city. Women were chilled with a direful something that made them speak under their breaths, and wonder. She seemed so happy, she was so wealthy, had so fine a husband, and above all, was so well liked and greatly admired, what could it mean?

And men were as far from the truth. To them, the lady was wonderfully attractive, and seemingly light-hearted as a bird.

With two exceptions, not one in the great city had ever had a glimpse of her real self. So they surmised a thousand things, but never approached the true one.

Ah! how little the thousands of restless beings of this great city know, one of the other. But you and I, reader, do not care to tell over the details of horror, let us leave them, then, to their proper vehicle, the daily paper. I never liked her, though I knew her well, and from her old father who died an object of charity a few years ago, I learned all I have told you. And now let us go on to happier interest.

The Vernons and Gleasons departed at the appointed time for New Hampshire, and Mrs. Casā, subdued by the tragedy coming so near to her, concluded to go with them. She did not expect to feel herself so much at home as in the changing throng where women glitter for glitters sake, and men show themselves to prove that they are able to be seen. Where fraud can make a show of reality, and money, — no matter how you get it, so you have it, — can cover with blinding dust all discrepancies. Perhaps you will take me for a cynical fault-finder, disappointed and embittered. No, I hope I am not that, though if any of us live to have much experience, or if we have much depth, we

shall learn that life is but a series of disappointments, and many bitter — it may be wholesome — must mingle with our sweets, but only it may prove, to invigorate and stimulate us to a better condition of mental and moral health.

Mrs. Casā found great delight in the companionship of Ethel, and as the lady was in a manner her guest, the girl felt it her duty to help her to the enjoyment of all the amenities of their bright, free life, and she found herself well repaid after, for in no one thing did Mrs. Casā so much delight to talk about, as her son, Guy Casā; and she could not have had a more flattering listener than Ethel. Here for the first time our little girl learned of the terrible illness that held her prince a prisoner through the summer two years ago, and of "his flight to this very place," said Mrs. Casā, "before he was well enough to sit up all day, and of his relapse after his return. It was the only unreasonable thing I ever knew Guy to do, unless I except his persistent study, and his determination to be a lawyer." So many pleasant days went on for Ethel, and she allowed herself to dream of a time, hence a year or two, when Guy should get through with his student life in Germany, and return home, and with this shy, sweet hope singing in her happy heart, she was coming up a fair maiden with kindly, holy influences surrounding her, and moulding her character for a noble woman. I shall not

tell you anything more — specially — about Ethel in this story, but one of these days I intend to write you another, and then I will tell you about her and Guy, and some others whom I have barely mentioned here.

I should fail to convey any idea of the distress of Mr. Vernon after he had withdrawn from the hateful presence of Mrs. Boyed, and began to think. He thought he was quite prepared to learn anything about Mrs. Evelyn, and still remain unshaken. But he was only a man after all. He had known from the first that some terrible scathing mental storm, in which humiliation and self-scorn had borne a large part, and had bowed her lower than sorrow alone could have done. But now when he stood face to face with the cringing, wicked thing that she had hidden in her own sad heart, he drew back from it, half in terror, half in disgust. He was only a man, and though his broad, just nature would and did find extenuations for almost every weakness, and forgiveness for almost every crime, still the old prejudicial reproach for woman, old as time, must have tainted even his gracious spirit, since he writhed so when the reproach pointed to one near him. Few men have risen above the abhorrently unjust idea that woman is a creature composed of vile impulses almost entirely, hedged in with a few weak virtues, and these in turn guarded by argus-eyed law, the defying of which is banishment from good society; regarding her nature as a flood of

evil pressing ever against these slender defenses that keep it in place, believing if one small or great virtue yields, all the rest are overcome, and she lost irredeemably. I do not use this language in regard to Mr. Vernon ; he was too pure in his own life to hold such extreme opinion, but I do say many men, and the average man as we count, does hold opinions with modifications like those just expressed, and I say I think the taint of centuries old prejudice had touched in a small degree, one of the grandest men the world ever saw.

He did not go to the parlor where he knew he should meet his family, but going direct to his chamber, he locked himself in to think. Certain links were supplied now, and he went over again and again the long months of suffering he knew she must have gone through, and his heart bled for her. Was there more and different suffering still? He had extracted one fang of the viper that threatened her, but others yet remained, and might reach her in spite of him. But then her place in his family ought to warrant her respectability, and so it would to all whose opinion was worth anything. Pshaw! just as though there was any warrant against calumny! No, there was no safety for this unfortunate woman, while she stood alone. She would be the target for every lawless eye, and an object for every flippant tongue, and the truest friendship could not protect her, hedge her as it would, should that vicious creature act

upon her determination. Nothing but the strong, high wall of influence that a husband could throw around her, would protect her from the beast that was coiled ready to spring, and nothing but a husband's devoted love, could effectually receive in place of her, the harmful sting.

It is a shameful thing to say, yet we all know that it matters little what the capers or the frolics or the scandals a woman goes through with, if she only succeeds in getting married, and growing severely proper. She is most generally received cordially enough, "for you see, she is well married, my dear," and marriage is the patch for all disorderly tatters, especially if the tattered feminine patched, became so austere in her life and practices thereafter, that one fancies sin standing at a safe distance, and grinning with the air of an old acquaintance, while she moans over it, and innocence growing shy and unnatural when she tries to make a pet of it. O dear! one would get so sick of the make-believes in this rather nice old world of ours, were it not that we do, after all, find a great deal that is truthful and good, simply because it is made so, not from any making over, therefore we naturally conclude that all the ill-organized things we call folk, is only putting the material together the wrong way, or human nature out of place, as we often see a misshapen body, that would be all right if only the work had been put together

right. I think we may safely pronounce the materials correct, and one of these days, thousand of years hence perhaps, the first model may be found, and then we shall have perfect folk ever after.

All the time I have been talking to you, Mr. Vernon was walking up and down musing, and after all his unrest, the only conclusion he could arrive at, was to offer his home and the protection of his name to the threatened woman, before they returned from the mountains. But perhaps she would not have him. Ah! a sick spasm of disappointment crept chilly over him. It would be so like such a proud, hurt creature, to refuse him from very pride, even if he could hope she might love him. That was it. I think the hardest part to bear in the whole unhappy business, was the fact that she had so unselfishly loved Allen Boyed, and perhaps loved him still, who but herself would know. Such being the case, mightn't she become his wife, if she was invited, merely for the anchorage it would give her. Well, so be it, he would take her, however she came to him, trusting to her integrity as he had from the first, and remembering, with a sigh that he gave to his past, that if she had loved and suffered, so had he, and if she would accept the shielding care he could give her, he would be content to wait for whatever more there was for them.

The cottage at Cedar Farm, I have already told you,

was roomy, but the number of visitors this summer would have considerably more than filled it, had not Mr. Vernon's thoughtful care provided for the extra number. The summer before, when they were there, he had sent for tents, provided with the necessary appurtenances for sleeping and dressing. In addition to these, this summer he had bought a long tent, furnished as dining-room, for the kitchen, large as it was, scarcely afforded room necessary for the folk, big and little, there assembled. These tents were spread in the wide green, which country people call the door-yard, and with the gay streamers fluttering from the snowy peaks, they presented an attractive appearance for miles around.

Now we find them in the middle of July, nicely arranged, full of that lazy bustle that people who give themselves up to do nothing but being amused, always indulge in. I should like to tell you about this happy summer, about it in detail, I mean, about the long rambling rides over the beautiful country, some on horseback, some in carriages, up the long, irregular hills, through the winding valley road, shaded and cool as grottos, and along the singing river banks, where the water soothed you with a whispering lullaby, and again clambering the steep, shelving mountain-crest, rising high above the clouds, or following for miles a narrow roadway, where the steep rock cliffs rise

up, up hundreds of feet above your head on one side, and a wild, stormy, foamy torrent tears over a rocky bed hundreds of feet below, on the other side. I should like to tell you about the twilight floats in the light skiffs that lay idly on the broad, lazy river that ran by the door; broad and lazy, yet deep enough to afford many a boat ride.

Then there were the long, sunny hours, when shade of tent or tree was most grateful, and books and music contributed each its share, and often at these times, when the ladies played at needlework, and the gentlemen stretched their full length on the cool grass, Mr. Vernon would entertain his never-tired listeners with stories of his wanderings. But I have no time to repeat much that was delightful, for I must hurry to the close of a story already long enough.

Mrs. Evelyn had changed a good deal under the warm and patient friendship that garnered her into unquestioning, loving hearts. Her noble, grateful nature could not receive so much without an effort to give back a little in kind of what she accepted. Her coldness melted, her listlessness disappeared, only the eternal sadness, palpable only to loving eyes, that seemed a part of her, still remained; aside from this she was bright and cheerful, and entered heartily into all their amusements, till finally she grew to her natural self. She gave reins to her suave tongue; nor quenched in

gloom the light of her radiant eyes; nor longer forbade the play of her rare smiles. Percy did not try to restrain his love for her, nor its manifestations, and none of the happy company but understood it except the object herself. She had grown to receive everything from him as from the rest, with grateful blindness to the possibility of arousing anything warmer. She was not vain, she underrated her own attractions; she only thought him kind and sympathizing. The summer days were dropping one by one into the past, and yet Percy could not bring about the opportunity he sought without making it, and he did not want to do that, so at last he made a confidant of Helen.

"I knew it, you wonderfully sly bluebeard," giving a little hug in her impulsive sisterly fashion, "we all know it but my beautiful Margaret herself, and I am so happy," kissing him again, "for you just deserve each other. I will bring around an opportunity to-night!"

And without knowing well how it came about, Mrs. Evelyn found herself in one of the tiny river skiffs, with Mr. Vernon guiding the frail thing down the gentle current of lapping water. In and out among the shadows they glided, saying very little, only once when he had done some little thing for her comfort, she said:

"How good you are to me! how kind you have been all these days to me." And for reply he only let the warm earnestness of his great, true heart glow upon her.





I love you Mrs. Evelyn, will you marry me?

But the look startled her into silence, and growing pale — if that were possible, for she was always pale now — she received the consciousness of this man's preference. What would she not have given to be at the house with the children around her. But he was still silent, perhaps she had been alarmed without cause. Onward they glided, the outlines of the encampment growing fainter, the strains of music and young voices blending with the shrill cry of the whip-poor-will, far away, beat softly on the mellow air. They had reached a small cove scooped up into the high bank, and fringed with all kinds of drooping vines and shrubs, here they paused to watch the moon rise. It was just coming up through the dark cedars, across the meadow lands beyond on the other side. She was watching the enlarging splendor, wishing to go back, yet not daring to request a return. It came at last, low, grave and infinitely tender.

“I love you, Mrs. Evelyn, will you marry me?”

She threw out both hands, as though to ward off a blow.

“O, Mr. Vernon, do not tell me this, it cannot be!”

“But I must tell this, my beautiful friend, for it is true!” and the gentleman leaned towards her, “I love you tenderly, and want you for my wife, for all true love tends towards marriage, but if this is unexpected to you, I will wait for my answer, darling, only do not tell me it cannot be!” He held out his hand to her, but she only drew back again.

"No, oh no! it cannot be! I do not need any time for an answer, it must always be the same! I shall never, never marry again."

"Are you sure this decision is unalterable? think again. I will make your life so happy if love can make it so! I will wait patiently too. I will surround you with every proof of my devotion, and you shall live just as you do now; I will not speak again until you give me to understand you are quite ready to listen to me. Won't you give me this hope?"

"Impossible!" she answered, now turning her face towards him white and drawn with sudden anguish at her realization of what she was putting from her. "Impossible! There is no hope, such happiness as you offer is not for me. O, if you could have been content with our beautiful friendship, but now I must give that up too. Yes," she answered his eyes, for his tongue said not a word, "I must give up my place in your family."

"Mrs. Evelyn, is that necessary?" he forced himself to speak, though his quivering lips expressed an emotion of which he had no reason to be ashamed. "You must not leave my house, though you cannot become its mistress. Ethel cannot spare you, and surely you will not deprive me of your presence as her friend, since you will not give me a dearer right to you."

"O, Mr. Vernon, it is fraught with danger. A

friendship between man and woman is possible, and can be very precious until love is mentioned, and then it is a friendship no longer. The love you offer me is temptingly sweet, since I cannot accept a love that urges to marriage, and a thousand times more perilous since I have no other attachment than for my child and friends.

She turned her head away again; for though she knew at this moment she was refusing a greater happiness than she had ever before dreamed of, she was resolute to refuse it still, and there is something very powerful in the conviction that one is beloved seriously, and she was so convinced, and rested more securely on that conviction, than she had ever done before.

"Mrs. Evelyn, are you sure there is a barrier to our union?" Her last words had lifted a mountain from his heart. "Are you sure the barrier is not an imaginary one, is not a shadow that my love could banish with a breath? Tell me all that is in your mind," and this time he took both her hands in his, and compelled her to look at him. "Let me be judge. I can think of nothing that you could do that I would not put aside, and certainly nothing another could do need to part us. Think again, dear one, it seems to me there can be nothing, nothing! that I could not overcome."

"Nothing?" and for one brief moment she listened to hope's pleading. Had she sinned then so terribly?

Would this grand-natured man forgive that which men never forgive? No, she would not put him to the test. None but Christ was pure enough and just enough to forgive her sin, she would humble herself only to him. Mr. Vernon held her hands closely, and breathlessly waited while these thoughts came and went. He was answered when the shadow again fell over her face, and she clasped both hands over her heart, and drew back with a sigh. Would nothing induce her to trust him? for he knew she would not accept him without disclosing her error.

“Impossible, impossible! If I have sinned, I shall carry the burden of my sin to one who can forgive, or I will accept the penalty, and bear it alone. Human love, warmer than friendship, is not for me.”

“And this is your decision?”

“This is my decision. Do not blame me, I did not dream of you loving me, and I cannot make you understand how sorely I am pressed, how sadly tried. There are duties, memories, obligations that must be obeyed. I have loved, and learned the bitterness of loving, though as I told you, I do not love now other than my child and friends. Your friendship is very sweet, but though I may have to give that up, no earthly power shall shake my resolve.”

They talked long, and she promised, since he most earnestly desired it, that she would remain in his family

still; for though she had put the precious boon far from her as an impossibility, he still hoped.

It was late when they returned, if with a better understanding, none the less friends, and though Helen's searching glance changed to one of disappointment, she could not believe it final, until her brother whispered:

"Not yet, little sister, we must have patience."

The first of October sent them all back to the city, healthier and happier, and the Atkins' richer in heart and mind, as well as pocket. When everything had settled back much as it had been, and our friends went about their business, or pleasure, or philanthropy, those two, who have our latest sympathy, found more and more in each other, that it would be hard for them to do without.

A year is too short a period to forget a kindness, even did such deep natures as Margaret's ever forget; and now that Christmas is here again, with pinching cold, royal gifts, penury and displays, Janie — promoted to Margaret's personal attendant and Willie's nurse, — was radiant under the various and appropriate gifts. Mrs. Ely and her girls were not forgotten, and they received presents from all whom they benefited the year before. Generous and beautiful gifts, such as dear ones exchange, were given and received, and after the happy bustle in the morning, it so happened that Mrs. Evelyn was alone in the drawing-room when Mr. Boyed was announced.

He had been gone from the city since the death of his wife, or as soon as he could get away after going through with the sickening details, until a month back, when he returned, and was received with eager friendship, anxious to console him.

He had met Mrs. Evelyn once or twice, with Ethel and Willie, a bright, lovely boy, who drew upon all that was best in the man's selfish nature, and made him feel a growing tenderness, and earnest desire to claim him as his own. He had called in a general way once, at the Vernon house, and though he could not fault any particular thing that he met with there, he had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not welcome.

But to-day he had decided to see Mrs. Evelyn alone, and offer her the home that should have been hers, more than a year ago. Her greeting was cold. He did not expect anything else, but he would not be discouraged. When by asking, he found that Mr. Vernon had taken the children, with two of the servants, to ride, and they would probably be gone some time, he determined to enter at once upon the subject that he had the vanity to feel would interest Mrs. Evelyn as much as it did him.

She sat quietly, as he pleaded his cause with all the eloquence of which he was master, sat with her hands folded within her lap, her eyes fixed on the piles of amber tinted clouds, behind which the sun was disap-

pearing. There was a look on her white face — well, if it was not indifference it was weariness — a look which, had he not been so determined to recover his lost power, must have answered him more effectually than words, how utterly hopeless his entreaty. She was not indignant at his presumption, he was too entirely out of her life or thoughts for her to feel it, and she would not feign it. She did not scorn him, he possessed the same beautiful form and face that had been so dear to her, and if she had mistook his sordid, cruel, false soul, for a generous, tender and true one, it was her own error, and sadly had she paid for it.

I don't think she was surprised at his declaration of unchanged affection; she had once so undoubtingly believed in his love, and had in no way forfeited it, that she had never really believed he had ceased to love her. She did wonder a little that he should dare address her again in the language of passion, wondered which he considered her, very forgiving, or very weak. Wondering thus in a listless way, she scarcely heeded his words, or heeded when he ceased to speak; not until he leaned towards her, and gathered her folded hands within his own, did she turn her darkening eyes towards him, and draw back her hands. Not resentfully then, but as though his touch was repugnant to her, yet of not consequence enough to merit reproof. However, he did not offer to take them again.

~ Won't you forgive me, Margaret? forgive all the pain I have caused you, love me once again in your old, sweet fashion, and so give me back the peace I have never known since I lost you," he pleaded.

~ Yes, I forgive you," then after a moment's hesitation, speaking slowly, — "I suppose I must have forgiven you long ago, for in order to be unforgiving we must think of the one so regarded, and you are never in my thoughts, unless you are present."

Whatever had been the expectation of Allen Boyed, he certainly had not looked for this utter indifference, this utter dropping him out of her mind. In fact, he did not believe it now, not that it was real, only assumed to lead him to a more ardent avowal. He had expected difficulty in regaining his former position, with so proud and sensitive a woman as Mrs. Evelyn. Indeed, with all his self-love he almost doubted his power to win possession of her, but he never doubted her love for him. But what should he say to her now, how reply to the most thorough damper she had so quietly laid upon his fervid eloquence. He had thought to meet scorn perhaps, a torrent of wordy indignation, plentifully wet with tears, but hoped it would all finally end in blissful reconciliation. But here she sat, her eyes again fixed on the clouds grown sombre in the lessening light, her hands again folded one within the other, seemingly oblivious of his very

existence. Here was a phase in this nature he had never discovered, a depth he had never sounded ; every chord that had once thrilled beneath his touch in perfect harmony, was snapped and tuneless. For the first time in his remembrance, this self-confident man was at loss. Throwing all the tenderness he could feel or feign, into his wonderful voice, pitched to its softest tone, with a quiver of reproach running through it, he murmured :

“ Margaret, have you wholly ceased to love me ? ”

“ You mistake, Mr. Boyed, I never loved you.”

“ Never loved me, after all the past, our past, you never loved me ? Pray explain, Mrs. Evelyn ! ” It was the man’s lips now that stiffened and quivered in their palor.

“ The explanation is very simple to me. I admired your fine form, your face of perfect shape and color, your manners of a well-bred gentleman, as I admire anything beautiful, shapely and pleasant. But it was the royal, God-like soul with which I invested this superb temple that I loved ; and my grief and pain was for my disappointment, when I found the real spirit of my idol, cruel, mean, and false beyond believing.”

“ Mrs. Evelyn ! ” He was walking the floor now, his face livid and positively ugly in expression. The lady remained unmoved, her face still to the window. Could she have felt one particle of interest in the man, it would have been gratifying to a feeling of vanity

Then as he marked the look of settled resolve in her white, anguished face, he said tenderly :

“ Remember, I do not demand to know anything of your past, only give me yourself. Let us put the past far away from us, with its ugly spectres, and make a present and future all our own. Come darling ! ”

He came close to her, and tried to fold her in his arms, gently but just as decidedly she drew back, and shook her head, there was no sign of yielding, though there was despairing resignation in the gesture.

“ No ! impossible ! impossible, and I must go away ! ”

“ Margaret, try and listen to me. I shall not give you up, until you convince me I am hateful to you. Though you put the world between us, I will still find you. Were I a young man in the bright morning of life, a stranger to its cares, with its pleasures all new, and beaming with the lustre of my own untried happiness, you might hesitate, for the love of that sunny time is fleeting and faithless as the pleasures among which it springs. But the glory of my youth has past, and I have known sorrow, and my love for you is born from the depths that sorrow has engendered, and like sorrow and the remembrance of sorrow, my love will be enduring.” Mr. Vernon spoke earnestly, yet with a hopefulness that came from the belief that he had a powerful advocate in the fair woman’s heart.

“ Your pleading almost tempts me to listen to you.

It is so sweet to be persuaded in accordance with one's own wish. Why is it not for us to find in each other the one wonderful friendship of which I suppose life holds the single possibility that we can be to each other, as no other can be to either. Let us be content with this."

"You forget the very truthful words you uttered last summer, and I daily realize their force. That friendship is possible between men and women until love is mentioned. I love you, and friendship between you and me is not possible."

She turned away without a word, indeed what could she say that she had not already said, but with that sad and determined shake of the head.

"Then I must tell you, Margaret. I know your secret, know all you would hide from me. That woman told me the night she killed herself! I know all your sufferings, and only ask that you will give me the privilege of atoning to you with my love, for another's baseness. Forgive me," — for she had turned to him with the frightened look of a wild creature at bay, in her large eyes. "Forgive me, I would not have wounded you by alluding to it, but you was so determined to let the vile circumstance come between us, that I could not consent. Say, my dear one, I am forgiven, and that I may hereafter bear your burdens, and stand between you and every ill."

He had approached her again, and put his arms about her, could she longer repulse him, longer refuse his brave, true love? And while they stand in the mutual consciousness of perfect love and trust; content with the great realization of this Christmas time, we will withdraw softly, that they may not know we have been listening, for we know, my friend — for I hope you are my friend by this time — that such a great, steadfast soul as Percy Vernon, will never causelessly change, and that Margaret shall prove to you the falsity and cruelty of the accepted aspersion, that if a woman has once erred, the flood-gates of her soul are open to evil forever after; but I believe there is more than one Margaret, who though she may have been tempted to sin through weakness, yet remains pure in spirit, and impervious to later temptations.













